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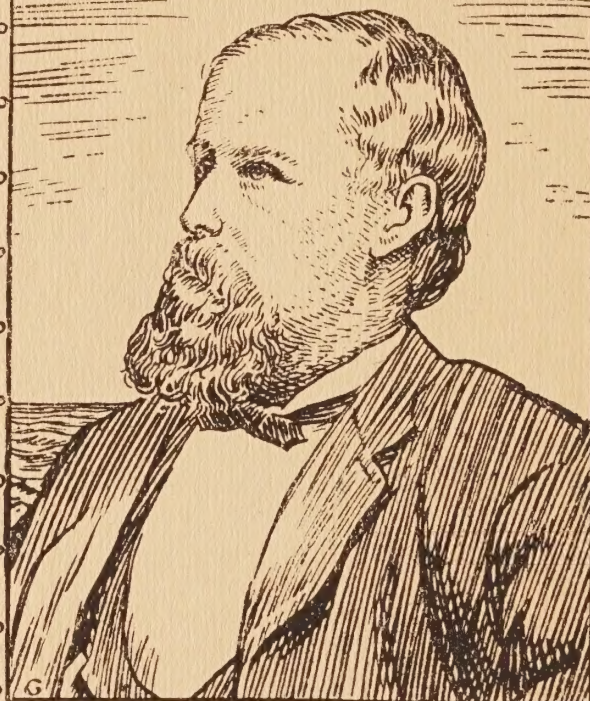


*The* KINGS TREASURIES  
OF LITERATURE



GENERAL EDITOR  
SIR A. T. QUILLER COUCH





CAPTAIN MACARTHUR



SAGAS  
OF THE SEA



BY  
ARCHIBALD  
MACMECHAN



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SOLE AGENT FOR SCOTLAND  
THE GRANT EDUCATIONAL CO. LTD.  
GLASGOW

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TO

JAMES METCALFE MacCALLUM, M.D.

*You cannot have forgotten the cruise of the lugger "Ruby" from one end of Lake Ontario to the other, or the three youths who composed her crew. You remember the bright summer mornings when we got under way, the blustering afternoons when the south-west wind forced us into some snug harbour, the sound night's sleep under the tent-like awning. You must recall the camp on the headland, the run down the Bay of Quinté, the thridding of The Thousand Islands and what we found there. Those were golden days, Shipmate. For their sake and the sake of the friendship which has endured throughout the voyage of life, I dedicate to you these true tales of less happy ships and far stranger adventures.*

ARCHIBALD MacMECHAN.







# PREFACE

*The old sea-faring men  
Came to me, now and then,  
With their sagas of the seas.*

NOVA SCOTIA well deserves the name of maritime province. It is almost an island, indented with countless harbours. No point in it is more than thirty miles from tide-water. Before the era of railways all communication with the outer world was necessarily by sea. Great forests of spruce and hardwood covered the shores. These conditions produced a ship-building, ship-owning, seafaring race of men.

Throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century, the building of wooden ships was the chief industry of the province. Every little port had its shipyard.

“You could stand on the hill by Fort Edward, and see where fifteen square-rigged vessels were being built at one time.”

The industry was profitable. Wherever a provincial family has a fortune, that fortune was made by building ships. Now the industry is dead, killed by the coming of steel and steam. It is an interesting chapter in the economic history of Canada, with *finis* written at the end.

Ship-building reacted upon the life of the province in two ways. It brought forth a breed of consummate sailors, like MacArthur and Coalfleet, and it turned every little outpost into a society of travellers, who went to the ends of the earth. To this day no people can more fitly be called “travelled” than the Nova Scotians.

Four of these "Sagas" illustrate the perilous life of Nova Scotia seamen. Three have their origin in old wars, revealing the chances of military service and some aspects of privateering. One shows how the sailors of the old navy faced disaster, and another how sailors of the new navy saved their ship.

They are all true. The notes in the Table of Contents give the original sources. In every case my aim has been to get at the facts, state them as plainly as may be and let them speak for themselves. Perhaps their common term is the cardinal virtue of Fortitude.

No plan underlies this collection. As the material for the tale presented itself, I worked it out. The province is incredibly rich in stories of the sea and its long-vanished fleets. Every port has its traditions of tall ships and fearless captains, their exploits and their tragedies. Not a tithe of them have been told, but perhaps this random handful will suffice to show the outer world the special "colour" of a community life so richly tinged with

*The wonder and mystery of the ships  
And the magic of the sea.*





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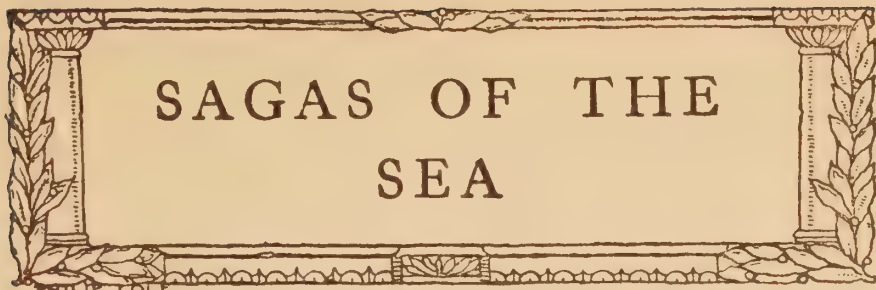


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## HOW PRENTIES CARRIED HIS DISPATCHES

### I

#### THE WRECK

IN November 1780, the Revolutionary War then raging, General Haldimand in command of the British forces at Quebec had matters of importance to transmit to Sir Henry Clinton in command of the British forces at New York. All roads by land being closed, his dispatches must needs be sent by the sea route. Accordingly they were made out in duplicate, one set being entrusted to Ensign Drummond of the 44th Foot, and the other to Ensign Samuel Walter Prenties of the newly raised 84th Royal Highland Emigrants. The young officers embarked in different vessels, Drummond in an unnamed schooner, and Prenties in the brigantine *St. Lawrence*, a heavily-built trader, loaded with deals. All told, there were nineteen men on board. Besides Prenties and his soldier servant, there were four passengers. The crew numbered thirteen, but the master was a disgrace to his profession and the seamen were "very indifferent." It was hard to keep the vessel free of water. On the 17th

of November the ill-fated voyage began. The brigantine and the schooner got their sailing orders and dropped down the river in company.

His Majesty's Service is never free from danger. The errand of these two boy officers was particularly hazardous. The season was late; and winter gales are pitiless. If they escaped the perils of winter navigation, there was the risk of capture. Swift-sailing, bold, heavily-armed American privateers infested the road they were to take and lay in wait by the sea-gates through which they must pass. Drummond of the 44th is only a name. Prenties was the son of Miles Prenties, a veteran of the Seven Years' War, and a well-known character in Quebec. Samuel Walter could read, write and speak French; he knew the manners of Indians; he had seen and admired the beautiful lakes of Killarney. His narrative, the main authority for this true tale, is a clear record of fact, written with eighteenth-century restraint. He was evidently able, brave, sagacious, trustworthy; and he was destined to suffer many things by sea and land.

Together the brigantine and the schooner made their way down the St. Lawrence to the Brandy Pots, suffering the usual accidents of the old sailing days. Head winds kept them at anchor. For four days and nights the *St. Lawrence* tacked wearily to and fro between Anticosti and Cape Rosière. From the start one pump was kept going constantly. It was found necessary to rig the second pump to keep her clear. The bitter cold of the high north set in. Both vessels were thickly encrusted with ice; and all hands including the passengers were busy cutting and breaking it away from the sides. It was the end of November before the *St. Lawrence*



and her consort turned the corner of Gaspé and stood down across the Gulf.

On the first day of December, the wind, which was north-west, increased to a heavy gale, with Arctic cold and storms of snow; and it blew ever fiercer and wilder for ten whole days without respite for a moment. The *St. Lawrence* was in trouble from the start. She leaked badly; and the crew were continually at the pumps, working like slaves in the effort to keep her afloat. The storm strained her hull worse and worse; the leaks increased; in spite of the severest labour, the brigantine sank lower and lower in the water. Ice formed all over her, throttled the running rigging, cased her deck, clogged her sides, and weighted her down like lead. Every man on board, with one exception, was constantly at work day and night to keep the vessel from sinking under their feet. The exception was the master who, from the start, remained in his berth, comfortably drunk. At last the exhausted sailors refused to continue their useless labour. With four feet of water in the hold, they left the pumps, saying that they did not care whether the vessel filled or not. For an anxious quarter of an hour they gave over pumping. Prenties met the crisis with tact and decision. He persuaded the sailors to return to their duty, and backed his persuasions by "the timely distribution of a pint of wine per man." In those fifteen minutes, however, the leak had gained a whole foot. The stimulant saved their lives. "Encouraged by the wine, which was issued to them every half-hour," the men succeeded in reducing the depth of water in the hold to less than three feet within two hours. "The captain," Prenties notes significantly, "remained in his cabin."

The schooner was also suffering, for her pilot had let her strike on rocks near Isle aux Coudres, and she too was leaking badly. She could render no assistance to her consort. The two tried to keep in touch by firing signal guns; but in the night of 3rd December no answering report came from the schooner. In the blackness and the storm she had foundered with all on board, including poor young Drummond of the 44th. The reason for sending dispatches in duplicate must now be apparent.

Still the north-west gale blew without remorse and drove the swaling, water-logged, ice-caked *St. Lawrence* helplessly before it. During the black night of 4th December, in a swirling snow-storm, the brigantine passed right through the labyrinth of the Magdalen Islands. The drenched, freezing, nerve-racked men could hear the breakers roaring all round them, above the tumult of the gale. Every moment they expected to strike. For the second time the sailors wanted to abandon the pumps. Why should they continue their disheartening, killing work, when the vessel might at any moment be shattered on a rock? The mate, an intelligent young man and well acquainted with his profession, told Prenties that the Deadman was on their lee. A network of small islands lay beyond. Even in fine weather, ship-masters steer clear of the Magdalens. In foggy and stormy weather they are a deadly menace. But by the mercy of God, the *St. Lawrence* found her way through them in the thick darkness. Encouraged by their miraculous escape from death, the sailors redoubled their exertions at the pumps, being heartened to their task by the occasional ration of wine which Prenties served out to them.



About five o'clock in the morning, Neptune took fitting vengeance on the recreant drunken captain. A huge following sea broke over the brigantine's quarter, stove in the dead-lights, started the stern-post, flooded the cabin and washed the master out of the bed he had occupied ever since the storm began. Henceforward he showed some slight interest in the fate of the vessel, whether she sank or swam, but the advice he offered was either impracticable or bad. The capable mate and Prenties virtually took command, though they used the professional knowledge of this greedy, treacherous drunkard. The shattering billow on the quarter made the leaks worse than ever. The crew tried to caulk the opened seams with beef cut into small pieces. It was without avail; the leaks could not be stopped. In despair, the sailors once more refused to work the pumps; and when Prenties succeeded in persuading them to go back, they found the pumps frozen and useless.

Daylight must have come late on the morning of 5th December to the passengers and crew of the doomed brigantine. Beside the winter gloom, the snow came so thick that Prenties could not see the masthead from the deck. Over the tormented sea, the moving, foam-crested hills of water, the swaling *St. Lawrence* staggered sluggishly along. Though filled to the water's edge, she did not sink any lower; her cargo of deals, now firmly cemented together by the ice, kept her afloat. There was, however, the constant danger of being thrown on her beam ends, capsized or swamped by the huge billows which every now and then made a clean breach over her. For steerage way she showed only her close-reefed fore-topsail of stout new canvas, which held to the bolt-ropes, in spite of the blizzard. Only one man

remained on deck, lashed to the helm. All he could do was to keep the vessel directly before the wind. The rest took refuge in the little cabin, expecting the end at any moment.

Prenties prepared for death; but his duty was to save his dispatches. By some miracle he might yet escape; but if he drowned, there should be evidence that he had done his utmost to fulfil his mission and obey his orders. He had his soldier servant open his trunks and collect all the letters they contained. These he fastened in the huge handkerchief of the period about his waist. Captain Hickey of the *Atalante* saved his dispatches in the same manner. The practical and faithful servant also offered his officer the money in the trunks. To Prenties in that hour money seemed the least valuable of things; the gold was an encumbrance not worth preserving. However, he allowed his man to take charge of it, and the hundred and eighty guineas so saved stood him afterwards in good stead.

About one o'clock the weather suddenly cleared, and land loomed dimly ahead, about three leagues away. At first, the watchers thought that they descried Isle St. Jean, and hope sprang up of finding a port and assistance. But the coast did not correspond with the charts on board. It was not low, but bold and rocky, "with mountains and precipices." The luckless *St. Lawrence* was, in fact, driving before the gale, not towards Prince Edward Island, but the lower south-west corner of Cape Breton. As she neared the precipitous coast, the men on board made out a line of breakers directly in her path. The vessel must pass through them before she could reach the shore. Evidently the brigantine was heading between Smith's Island (which



Des Barres gives as Henry Island in his superb chart) and Susannah Point. According to Des Barres, the depth of water here was two fathoms at the shallowest.

“We expected that our fate would be determined here.”

But though the little *St. Lawrence* was swept by many icy seas, she did not strike the reef, nor did she capsize in the breakers.

Two miles nearer the dreaded lee shore was seen to be high and rocky. When within a mile a fine sandy beach was descried, and a bold shore. It was almost a miracle; for this combination offered another chance for life. If the vessel was fated to be driven ashore, this was probably the best place for such an accident to happen on the whole west coast. On drove the *St. Lawrence* before the storm, over that last remaining mile of her last voyage. Then she struck heavily, recoiled, paused and struck again. At the first shock the mainmast jumped out of the step; at the second, the foremast, but neither went over the side, being firmly held by the well-stowed, ice-cemented deals in the hold. On grounding the rudder was violently unshipped, nearly killing the helmsman held in his place by the lashings; and the keel, the vessel's back-bone, was broken. Still her planks held together. The shore combers broke over her, smashing in the fabric of the stern, and driving passengers and crew out of the cabin to take refuge in the shrouds. At the same time the billows lifted the brigantine nearer and nearer the shore, and swung her round broadside on to the beach. The exact spot where the *St. Lawrence* was wrecked is not clearly indicated in the narrative, but a careful study

of all the data seems to show that she was driven ashore a little to the north of Little Judique Ponds, which Des Barres names Lake Charenton.

The wreck among the breakers must have been one cake of ice, as was also the boat which had been so carefully secured. It was hard work to cut her loose and launch her, and the difficult task was complicated by the drunkenness of the sailors. When they at last succeeded in getting the boat over the side without swamping, Prenties, his servant, the mate and two sailors jumped in. The boy passenger jumped short, fell into the water, and was rescued with great difficulty. In the bitter cold, their drenched clothing turned to frozen mail. Between the brigantine and the shore were some forty yards of wild, breaking, recoiling billows to struggle through. When half-way, a comber filled the boat, but a second swept her high and dry up the sandy beach.

That first night ashore must have seemed to the survivors a horrible dream that would never end. Unsheltered on the open beach from the rage of the black December storm, without food or fire, in their frozen clothing, the plight of the six must have been miserable beyond words. To find some slight shelter, they waded through snow waist high to a wood some two hundred and fifty yards away. The problem of Prenties was how to keep himself and his companions awake. Sleep meant death; but in spite of all his exertions, the boy they had saved from drowning a few hours before, lay down in the snow and passed peacefully away. His last request was that Prenties would write to his father in New York. The two sailors and Prenties's servant gave way to drowsiness and flung themselves

down in the snow. Prenties and the mate broke branches off the trees and beat them to keep them from yielding to sleep. Their violence was but partly successful. When morning came at last, these men found their legs frozen to the knees, and the usual remedy, rubbing with snow, was without avail. Prenties alone came through that terrible night without frostbite, though he too had to struggle against the same fatal drowsiness. Probably he was more warmly dressed than the others. He was certainly more intelligent, and more inured to the bitter Canadian winter.

When the long-desired morning broke at last, the men on shore perceived that the *St. Lawrence* still held together, that the waves had lifted the wreck still nearer to the shore, and that the men on board were still alive. When the tide ebbed, they were able to swing themselves ashore by means of a line from the jib-boom end. They all did so except the carpenter, who remained on board drunk, and a Captain Green who had been frozen to death in the night. The captain had brought tinder-box, flint and steel with him, so it was possible to light a fire. When the frost-bitten men felt its warmth, their sufferings became excruciating; and later, gangrene set in. Still they had fire, which kept them from perishing, and this fire they maintained throughout the 6th, 7th, and 8th of December, while the storm blew with unabated violence. For those three days they were totally without food. In the unemotional phrases of Prenties:

“We still remained without any kind of provisions, and began to be reduced in strength for want of nourishment.”



In the night of the 8th, the timbers of the sturdy little *St. Lawrence* finally gave way under the ceaseless hammering of the heavy breakers. The afterpart as far as the mainmast was broken up, but the rest of the hull hung together, with the masts still standing. As a result, some salt beef, some fresh meat that hung at the stern and some onions were washed ashore. On these the castaways made a meal, which after four days of black fasting in the bitter cold, they "thought a most delicious repast."

Restored somewhat by the much-needed food, they set to work to salvage the provisions thrown up upon the beach. Prenties and the mate evidently did most of the work; the others with their frost-bite sores could not have been much help. Next they gathered up such planks as had been washed out of the gaping hull, two hundred and fifty in number, carried them into the sheltering wood and built there a rude hut measuring ten feet by twenty. Having no nails, they cut two twenty-foot poles and lashed them to trees ten feet apart. Against these poles they laid the planks at an angle of sixty degrees; at the ends the planks were placed upright. This rude lean-to was roofless and open to the weather; the fire was built all along the centre, as in the primitive Icelandic hall, and the smoke escaped through the wide opening overhead. The entrance was on the south-east side. It was a poor shelter, but better than a bivouac in the snow.

Taking stock of their stores, they found they had between two and three hundred pounds of salt beef, and "a considerable quantity of onions." There was no "bread," the sailors' name for biscuit or hard-tack; for the bread-casks had been smashed and the contents

spoiled by the sea. The daily ration agreed on was one-quarter of a pound of beef and four onions per man, just sufficient to prevent starvation, but still luxury compared with the two-twenty-fifths of a pound of spoiled bread per head, on which Bligh kept his scare-crow crew alive during their voyage of more than three thousand miles in an open boat. The privations of the passengers and crew of the *Industry* were even greater, but they were not so long continued.

By 11th December the fierce ten days' gale had blown itself out. After clearing the boat of ice and sand, three of the men went out to the wreck with the design of opening up the hold. Over the hatches the cables were frozen in a solid lump. With their single wretched axe, it took the three men the whole day to cut them away. Next morning they returned to the vessel, finished chopping at the cables, made an opening in the deck, and secured further supplies. The inventory included two casks of onions, one small barrel of beef, three barrels supposed to contain apples, but in reality bottles of Canadian Balsam, one bottle of oil, one quarter-cask of potatoes, one axe, one large iron pot, two camp-kettles, and about twelve pounds of tallow candles. All these things were safely transferred to the shore, and stowed in a corner of the hut. Apparently this was all that could be saved from the cargo; for though the men went on board again on the 14th, all they brought on shore was some of the head-sails, which they used to make their wretched hut "tolerably warm and comfortable."

Prenties and the mate went out together frequently, making short exploratory trips into the surrounding, snow-bound wilderness, in the hope of finding some

settlement. About the 19th of December, they followed up a river, apparently the south-west branch of the Mabou, for ten or twelve miles. On the trees they found axe marks, and farther on, an Indian wigwam with a moose-hide hanging over a pole. It was the first of many mirages of hope which lured the unfortunate men farther and farther into the wilderness, and in the end deluded them. The two explorers took away the moose-skin; their starving companions ate it afterwards in their extremity; and Prenties cut a piece of birch bark in the shape of a hand and fastened it to a pole so that it pointed in the direction of their camp by the beach. If the Indians returned, found the moose-hide gone, and this strange finger-post, they might follow up the trail; but nothing ever came of it.

About this time Prenties discovered that the scanty stock of food was dwindling far too rapidly. Suspecting foul play, he kept watch at night, and discovered that the treacherous captain and three sailors were robbing the rest of them; they had taken about seventy pounds. After this sickening discovery, either Prenties or the mate always remained on guard in the camp, while the other scouted the surrounding country. But the loss in provisions could not be made good.

If the food supply was dwindling too fast, the number of mouths to be fed was also shrinking. The boy passenger had died the first night ashore. On the 14th of the month, the drunken carpenter, also a passenger, became delirious; he had lost his feet by frost-gangrene; the next day he died.

“We covered him with snow and branches of trees, having neither spade nor pick-axe to dig a grave for him.”



On the 18th the second mate died in delirium from the same causes.

“We felt,” writes Prenties, with dreadful truth, “but very little concern at the death of our companions, either on their account or our own.”

On the 20th a third sailor died, and the body was simply covered with branches; it could not be buried. The castaways had sunk into apathy; and the death of two men had pushed off into the dark future the spectres of starvation, cannibalism and death. Their number was now reduced to fourteen.

## II

### THE BOAT JOURNEY

If the survivors of the *St. Lawrence* remained passively in their hut, a lingering death by famine seemed their certain fate. Prenties, the man of resource, the natural leader who emerges in a crisis, proposed that a party set out to find some settlement. With the most careful husbandry, their miserable provisions would last only six weeks. If they had arms and ammunition, they might have lived on game until the spring, for tracks of animals were plentiful in the snow. The whole winter was before them. When the last ration of beef was eaten—what? Across the minds of the famishing verminous men with their festering sores in that smoky hut floated a black and desperate thought of the last resource—a nightmare which became a horrid

reality. The alternative was meeting fate in the open. It was better to perish somewhere in the snow-clad wilderness trying to find assistance than await the slow coming of death in that ten-by-twenty-foot chamber of horrors.

All agreed to the proposal of Prenties, but at once a formidable difficulty emerged. The boat, so carefully preserved all through the storm, had been battered about by the seas until every seam gaped. It could not float five minutes. Dry oakum, which could be easily picked from rope-ends, would not serve by itself, and there was no pitch to be had. Prenties, the inventive, thought of the Jewish merchant's bottles of Canada Balsam disguised as apples. By alternately boiling this liquid and letting it cool, they got it thick enough to serve as a substitute for pitch, and with it they payed the boat and made it fairly watertight. They also contrived a small mast and a sail which stood them in good stead one notable day when the wind was definitely in their favour.

The boat party consisted of the worthless captain, the capable first mate, Prenties, his soldier servant, and two sailors. Their shoes were almost worn out, and some foot covering must be devised. Out of spare canvas, Prenties fashioned twelve pairs of "mowkisins," with no other tools than his knife (the only one amongst the whole party), and a rude needle which he made out of the handle of a pewter spoon. The unravelled canvas supplied his thread. These moccasins must have been slight protection against cold and snow. An exact division of the provisions was made into fourteen equal parts, the eight men who remained in the hut having the same proportional allowance of rations as the six



THE DEPARTURE OF ENSIGN S. W. PRENTIES AND HIS FIVE COMPANIONS FROM THE  
SCENE OF THE WRECK OF THE BRIGANTINE "ST. LAWRENCE" ON JANUARY 4, 1781  
*(From an aquatint by Robert Smirke)*





adventurers who were to set out in the boat. The individual allowance was four ounces of beef per day, and, at this rate, the supply would last six weeks.

The boat party planned to start on New Year's Day, 1781, but, owing to adverse winds, they could not get off until the afternoon of 4th January. Their first run was into the deep bay nine miles to the northward, where they took refuge for the night from the south-east wind which threatened to blow them out to sea. The "fine sandy beach" where they landed was evidently near Port Hood. Now this deep bay could not be found, because, since Des Barres made his famous survey, the sea has washed the neck of land away. They made themselves fairly comfortable for the night with a fire and wigwam of pine branches. Here a mirage of hope once more deluded them. Chips cast up by the sea and long poles bearing marks of the axe suggested that human beings were not far off. With two men, Prenties set off towards "a high point of land at about two miles distant," along the sandy beach, which was fairly free from snow. Before they had gone a mile they came upon the remains of a Newfoundland shallop half buried in the sand. It seemed to have been set on fire. On they hurried to the "point of land" which was probably some part of Cape Linzee. From the summit they spied to their "inexpressible joy" some houses about half a mile away. Relief seemed near at hand. When the three explorers reached the "houses," however, these proved to be old, empty, abandoned sheds, which had been used by fishermen for curing cod. Diligent search among the abandoned casks failed to bring any food to light. They did find some cranberry bushes from which they

picked about a quart of fruit. Some they ate; the rest they loyally kept for their companions. It was a "mortifying disappointment." Though the results of this expedition were negative, they encouraged the shipwrecked men to persevere in their chosen course, northward and ever northward, a decision which proved fatal to five and brought everyone to death's door.

Then the north-west gale began to blow again as fiercely as ever. The ice formed along the coast; and the boat party were forced to remain in the bay, storm-stayed, until the 10th of the month. Calm succeeded; then the wind shifted to the opposite quarter, blew the icepack out into the Gulf, and allowed the boat to proceed on her voyage. On the 11th, the castaways made a fresh start, rowing with their four "indifferent" oars towards a headland about twenty-one miles to the northward. Prenties is a good judge of distance, and he is so precise in his dates that it seems safe to infer that he kept a journal. Before obtaining his colours he had been in the commissariat, where he would learn method. The distant headland was not reached that day, nor for many a day. During the night, the boat party were forced to land on a narrow stony beach, about four hundred feet long by fifty broad, backed by a precipice a hundred feet high. Here they were windbound for two long miserable weeks, penned in between the cliff and the sea, in snow three feet deep, the unrelenting north-west gale blowing all the time. Then, the favourable south-east wind came round and enabled them to start again in showers of snow and rain. That they were able to start at all was due to the resourcefulness of Prenties. The boat was so leaky before the last landing that two men were constantly



baling, while two rowed. On account of the beach formation, it could not be dragged up far enough to prevent damage by the waves. On examination, the balsam was found to be all worn off, and the leaks were worse. Prenties persuaded the men to throw water over the oakum in the seams so as to make a coating of ice; and the device succeeded. The ice kept out the water, and the boat, their one hope, was once more seaworthy.

On the 27th, by Prenties's computation, they rowed twelve miles. The next day a warm rain melted the ice off the boat, and no progress could be made. On the 29th, Prenties caught a partridge, which was boiled and divided into six portions, for which they cast lots. This "delicious meal" was remembered as a luxury like the quart of cranberries. On this same day they made a stage of seven miles, and on the 30th they rowed six miles more in the freezing winter rain.

February was well-nigh fatal to the boat's crew, though it began auspiciously. On the first day of the month they made a gain of five miles; but on the second they were wind-bound all day. February 3rd gave them their best run; for wind and weather favoured them, and, under their improvised sail, they sped along at four or five miles an hour, though one man was constantly baling the crazy boat with a camp-kettle. After running about sixteen miles, they sighted "exceeding high land," to which they directed their course. About two o'clock in the afternoon, when they were, as they thought, within nine miles of it, they discovered an island ahead of them about twenty miles "from the main." This was St. Paul's, that fatal rock which has been the bane of many a tall ship. The high land for

which they steered along this precipitous coast was so high that it seemed nearer than it was in reality. Instead of nine miles of distance, they found they had run nearly fifteen before they came abreast of it. The high land was the northern extremity of Cape Breton. Night was falling when they reached Cape North. They could not stop, as landing was too dangerous, and in the darkness they doubled the cape. Their course now turned to the south, the wind became unfavourable. They had to strike sail and row with all four oars. The wind was so strong that they must have been blown out to sea but for the heavy north-east swell which drove them towards the shore.

On they kept in the dark until about five in the morning, when they heard the sea rolling heavily on a sandy beach. Their strength was gone, surf made landing hazardous; but they turned the boat toward the shore and reached it safely, suffering nothing worse than another drenching. They hauled their boat up, and made a fire. The woods were near, and Prenties had kept the precious tinder-box in the breast of his uniform, so that it was dry. For nearly twenty-four hours they had been working hard, in constant anxiety and peril, with next to no food. They were worn out, and could hardly keep awake. So each man watched in turn, and kept the fire burning while the rest slept. Otherwise all must have frozen to death. The beach on which they bivouacked in the snow was the bar across Aspy Bay.

By this time the miserable stock of salt beef was spent. Death by starvation was nearer than ever; the horrid alternative was considered by Prenties and the mate, but they agreed to put it off until the last extremity.

On the morning of 4th February, two men were set to work freeing the boat from the sand which the waves had washed into it, and caulking the seams by throwing water over them until ice formed. The other four scattered in search of provisions. Prenties and the mate followed the beach south as far as the inlet. Here they found the one oyster bed in Cape Breton, but on opening the shells, searching them diligently, they found nothing inside. "The Glittering Gate" represents a burglars' hell as an everlasting uncorking of beer bottles which are everlastingly empty. Prenties knew the reality of Dunsany's poetic fancy. It is little wonder that he wrote "This again made us curse our destiny." But the two did not return to the boat empty-handed. By brushing away the snow from the banks, they discovered buried rose-bushes which must have made the landscape gay in June. Now they yielded about two quarts of hips, which served to blunt somewhat the hunger of the famishing men. Towards the end of this bitter day they launched the boat again, but they made slow and difficult progress through the ice. When they attempted to land, the tinder-box fell into the water, so lighting a fire was impossible. Painfully they re-embarked and made their way back to the camp they had left, breaking the ice all the way, and, by the mercy of God, they found some embers of their fire which they quickened into a blaze. Otherwise they must have frozen to death in the bitter night that followed; for they were wet as usual when making a landing. That night Prenties made tinder by cutting up the remainder of his shirt and charring the linen. To be without the means of making fire meant death. Not now expecting to survive, Prenties used to carve his name on the bark



of the largest trees wherever he landed, so that trace of him might possibly be found after his death. When in the deserted store-house near Cape Linzee he had written on the wall a brief account of the wreck, in English and French, with a request that anyone who fell in with it would transmit the information to his father in Quebec. That he should perish in the wilderness and his fate be never known weighed on his mind almost more than the thought of death.

### III

#### THE RESCUE

To recount in detail the tale of what the castaways suffered throughout the rest of the month would be too harrowing. It was a monotone of misery. There is also a lack of precision in the narrative, as if Prenties had grown too weak to keep his log. On 12th February the shipwrecked men started again, their only food being a dozen tallow candles. These they rationed out and shared. On this poor fare they had still strength enough to launch and row the boat for short stages along the coast southward, and haul it up on the beach. They would make camp by brushing away the snow, building a shelter with branches, with others to lie on, and kindling a fire. The boat's sail was used as a common blanket. By 18th February they had reached a point somewhere near Ingonish, and were too weak to proceed farther. They tried to keep themselves alive on boiled kelp with a portion of candle melted into the brew;

but the mess made them violently sick. When the candles were exhausted, they lived on boiled kelp alone, which, "however nauseous at any other time, afforded us then, not only some kind of nourishment, but even an exquisite relish." This diet soon produced a hideous bloating of the whole body, in contrast to their previous emaciation.

The swellings grew worse and worse. The sufferers could sink their fingers into their skin two inches, and the mark would remain for upwards of an hour. Their eyes were nearly closed. They were so weak they could no longer use the axe; they could barely crawl in turn to the rotten branches lying about on the snow and break them up to keep their smouldering fire alive. Again the horrible alternative of sacrificing one man for the preservation of the rest was actually discussed. To this inhuman necessity, however, the wretched survivors of the *St. Lawrence* were not reduced. On the 28th February, as the six were lying round their miserable fire, more dead than alive, they thought they heard voices in the woods. Soon two Indians with guns in their hands came out of the forest. In the moment of their utmost need, the unhoped-for rescue had come.

It was a strange meeting. The six filthy, long-haired, bearded, grotesquely bloated "white men," their skin showing through their tatters, their eyes invisible, got up and advanced with the greatest eagerness imaginable toward the Indians, laughing and crying hysterically. The two Indians, on the other hand, started back, and seemed fixed for a few moments to the ground with surprise and horror. Then Prenties, knowing their customs, went up to one of them and shook hands. The civilised salutation assured the savages that the

six wild, repulsive creatures were not ghosts or wendigoes, but human beings. They all returned to the fire together, and one who could speak a little broken French asked Prenties whence they came and what had happened. As concisely as possible Prenties told him. "The Indian seemed to be very much affected by our sufferings."

Could the savages furnish them with any kind of food? They assured Prenties that they could. Then noticing how inadequate was the camp fire, the Indian picked up the white man's axe to cut some wood. Laughing at its futility, he drew his own tomahawk from his side, cut a quantity of fuel, and built up a blazing fire. Then he picked up his gun and, without more words, glided into the forest with his companion. This was the first time in many days that the frozen, half-naked famishing men had had a good fire. It was "the greatest refreshment."

The silent departure of the Indians made some of the castaways afraid that they would not return; but Prenties knew better. Three hours later, a bark canoe rounded a point near by, with the two friendly Indians in it. Landing they brought to the fire some smoked venison and a bladder of seal-oil. They melted snow in the cooking-pot and boiled some of the meat, of which they gave a small portion to each with a little of the oil. It was a wise precaution. A full meal would have been fatal. Over-eating killed one of their companions in the hut.

After giving them this strengthening food, the Indians conveyed them to their camp, three at a time. It was about five miles away by water and a mile from the shore in the woods. At the seaside a party of three Indians and about twelve women and children met the



rescued men and escorted them to their camp. It consisted of three wigwams, one for each family. The savages treated their strange guests not only "with the greatest humanity," but also with common sense, giving them only hot broth to sup, and no solid food whatever.

The head of the little clan was a very old woman. She was very curious to learn the castaways' story. Prenties therefore related their tale of disaster in fuller detail, speaking in French, and the Indian translating into his own tongue. The old woman was "exceedingly affected at certain parts of it." His narrative recalled to the matriarch the casting away of the *Auguste* on North Cape in 1761 and how the famous partisan leader Lacorne de St. Luc escaped from the wreck, though his two children were drowned in his arms. The Indian interpreter had found St. Luc on the shore five days afterwards and guided him to Louisbourg. For this service the Frenchman still owed him thirty pounds, according to the Indian's story.

As soon as he felt somewhat restored, the thoughts of Prenties turned to his companions in misery at Little Judique Ponds. He explained to the Indians the lie of the land, the river with the small island opposite. They recognised the place from his description; it was about a hundred miles away, and the trail led over mountains and across rivers. Now Prenties remembered his purse of guineas, and he offered to pay the Indians for their trouble in making such a long journey and rescuing the other survivors of the *St. Lawrence*. They were all delighted when he showed them the gold. He presented the squaws with a guinea apiece, to their great delight. To the three Indians who were going to

the rescue he paid twenty-five pounds down, and he promised them twenty-five pounds more on their return. After making snow-shoes and moccasins for themselves and the men in the hut, they set out on the second day of March. It would seem that no time was lost in dispatching this relief expedition.

A fortnight later the three Indians returned with only three of the eight men who had been left behind in the hut. After the boat party left, they lived on their four ounces of salt beef per day until the supply was exhausted. Then they ate the moose-hide. Three died of hunger, and the five subsisted like the fabled ghouls until the Indians reached them. One of them ate too much and expired in agony. Another man shot himself accidentally with an Indian's gun. The three survivors "were in a very miserable and reduced condition." Of the nineteen men on board the *St. Lawrence* only nine remained alive. Prenties comments, "I rather wonder how so many persons could, for the space of three months, go through such complicated distresses from excessive cold, fatigue and hunger."

After another fortnight of rest and recuperation, Prenties felt strong enough to proceed with his dispatches. He came to an agreement with the Indians. They were to convey him to Halifax for forty-five pounds, and in addition he was to provide food and supplies wherever obtainable. On 2nd April they set out, Prenties, his servant, young Mr. Winslow of New York, who had lived through the horrors of the hut by Little Judique Ponds, and the two Indian guides. The other six remained in the Indian encampment, and were to be taken to Spanish River, now Sydney, in the spring. Each man carried a pair of snow-shoes, four pairs of

moccasins, and provisions of moose-meat and seal-oil for fifteen days. They had arms and ammunition. The same day they reached the place called by the English "Broad Oar," which was apparently the entrance to the Bras d'Or. On 5th April they arrived at "Broad Deck." Here Prenties bought a bark canoe for five pounds from Indians who were hunting there, and also two komaticks or Indian sleighs for travelling down the lake either over the ice or by the open water. Thaws and long detours wasted much time. Prenties was still weak and welcomed a halt and rest of a day or two in the woods. Their provisions gave out, but one of the Indians shot a moose and so obtained a plentiful supply of meat. In traversing the beautiful lakes of Cape Breton, Prenties is reminded of Killarney. He is probably the first human being to feel the charm of those great stretches of water, which the high wooded hills surround and watch eternally. Certainly he is the first to express his admiration in English.

On 20th April the party reached St. Peter's, where Nicolas Denys once had his fort. It was a small settlement of four or five families. Here they were well treated by a generous Irishman, Lawrence Cavanagh, whose son was the first Catholic to sit in the Assembly of Nova Scotia. He was a trader, and had been plundered recently by two American privateers from Boston. They had robbed his stores at their leisure, taking what they wanted to the value of three thousand pounds. Though Prenties was a total stranger to him, Cavanagh cashed a draft on his father for two hundred pounds. On the 27th the party reached Canso, being put across the strait in a sloop from Narrashock in Isle Madame. They brought their canoe with them.



Here was a new danger to face, which had been anticipated from the first, capture by American privateers. Prenties exchanged the rags of his scarlet coat for a plain brown civilian dress, and entrusted his precious dispatches and private papers to one of his Indian friends. At Canso he found that his precautions were far from foolish. Though no privateers were actually lying in the harbour when he arrived, several had been seen at anchor, and a sixteen-gun brig from Boston had sailed only the day before. Rust, the great man of the place, was brother-in-law to the first lieutenant of this vessel; and he was hand in glove with the "rebels." He held the office of Justice of the Peace, drawing one hundred pounds per annum from the government of Nova Scotia; and he supplied the American cruisers with all necessaries as well as useful information. Prenties offers the sensible suggestion that a British frigate on this cruising ground would put a stop to the activity of the hostile privateers. The government acted upon it and detached for this service the famous *Pandora*, which brought back the mutineers of the *Bounty* from the South Seas, and was wrecked with loss of life on the way home. In the summer of 1782 she picked up several prizes about Canso.

Rust asked too many questions, the purport of which Prenties well understood. Fearing treachery, he gave evasive answers and tried to pass himself off as the captain of the *St. Lawrence*. But even a less astute person than Mr. Rust could hardly mistake a young army officer for the tarpaulin master of a small trader. Prenties bought eight pounds of biscuit and a quantity of salt pork from Mr. Rust, who charged him three prices; and at three o'clock in the morning, without

informing that gentleman or taking any formal leave, the five made off in the canoe.

The worst trials of Ensign Prenties were now over. It took nine days to paddle along the coast to Halifax. The Indians speared lobsters and flat-fish, which must have been a welcome change from the pork and hard-tack. American picaroons were sighted at various points along the coast; but the canoe was not noticed by them. On May 7th the party reached Halifax in safety; but Prenties had to wait two whole months for transportation to New York. Finally he got passage in H.M.S. *Royal Oak*, and delivered his dispatches "in a very ragged condition" to Sir Henry Clinton, after that officer had given him up for lost. They had been nine months on the way, and in all probability, by the irony of Fate, they had in that time lost all their importance.

It is satisfactory to know that the capable mate got command of a vessel at Halifax, and that Prenties received from the War Office some compensation for his lost kit, his outlay and his sufferings in King George's service. Most of his hardships and the deaths in the smoky hut by Little Judique Ponds might have been avoided if the boat party had turned their faces south instead of north. With the prevailing north-west wind and a little luck they might have reached Canso in a day or two. They took four months. Perhaps the true explanation of their strange roundabout course is that they made a false start. That first tramp up the river, the unfortunate discovery of the deserted wigwam and the moose-hide turned their thoughts to the northward. In that direction must lie the settlements which they sought. Then the half-burned shallop at Cape Linzee

and the empty huts must have strengthened their conviction that they were on the right track. Once committed to this course, they could not turn back. Fate forced them on and on. Modest as is the narrative of Prenties, it shows clearly that but for his knowledge, resource and leadership the whole party must have perished. That even nine men out of the original nineteen survived such hardships and privations in a Cape Breton winter proves what stubborn stuff the human frame is made of, and what the human spirit can endure.





## JORDAN THE PIRATE

ON the morning of the 13th of September, 1809, a strange little craft called the *Three Sisters* was off Cape Canso heading for Halifax. She was a new fishing schooner of about sixty-four tons burden, tub-like in build, her beam being considerably more than the traditional one-third of her length, which was forty-five feet six inches from stem to stern. Besides her tubbiness, she had other noticeable peculiarities—a remarkably high stern and a very swift sheer, which means that, seen in profile, the line of her rail ran steeply down from the lofty poop to the bow. Not much money had been spent on the usual decorations of a vessel. She had no carved and painted figure-head, no gallery to her square stern, and no cabin windows; she had not even the usual wooden mouldings there. Instead, she bore mere bands of yellow paint on her black body. Another yellow streak ran fore and aft along her sides, and, from the break of the quarter-deck forward of the main-mast, a band of white paint stretched to her stern. She was a noticeable craft. Her dumpy build, her colour scheme, her measurements, her lack of the usual marine adornments would make her easy to identify as far as a spy-glass could reach.

Her cargo consisted of about six hundred quintals of dried cod. Four men were sufficient to handle her. John Stairs, master mariner, was in command. He belonged to a family which has been honourably

connected with the commerce of Halifax for well-nigh a century and a half. There is fighting blood in the strain. Captain William Stairs was Stanley's right hand in the Emin Bey expedition, and bequeathed the name to a peak in Ruwenzori. His brother commanded H Company of the Royal Canadian Regiment, which, on 27th February, 1900, enfiladed Cronje's trench at Paardeburg, and so forced him to raise the white flag. For this feat, Captain H. B. Stairs was enrolled in the Distinguished Service Order. When the Great War broke out, twelve youths of the name donned khaki; one Halifax church has mural tablets to six who never returned. The mother of this John Stairs died of the yellow fever plague in Philadelphia; and he was sent to Halifax to be brought up by his maternal grandfather. Like so many spirited boys, he ran away to sea, and soon worked up to the rank of master. On this September day he had to fight for his life.

The mate was John Kelly, a black-haired, soft-spoken young Irishman of twenty-three, about five feet six inches in height. His thin rather ruddy face was pitted with small-pox. The two hands were Benjamin Matthews, seaman, and Thomas Heath, seaman and pilot, which meant in those days a man with local knowledge taken to assist in the navigation of a vessel in one voyage. Heath was a Halifax boy, with a wife and two little children.

Besides her crew, the *Three Sisters* carried six passengers, namely, Edward Jordan, his wife Margaret, and their four children. The eldest was a boy of nine; the eldest of the three little girls was badly disfigured by burns on her arm and back. Like Kelly, Jordan was an Irishman; he was about thirty-eight years of

age, with dark hair, dark eyes, large eyebrows, a ruddy complexion and very white teeth. He is described as having a "very black beard," which means that when he omitted to shave, the face hair came out thick and dark. To look at him you would not say that there was any harm in him. People noted that he had an innocent expression; but he had had a varied career before this eventful voyage in the vessel that once had been his own.

Born in the county of Carlow, he joined the rebels who were preparing for "Ninety-eight." In 1797 he was captured, tried, and sentenced to death for his share in the projected rebellion, and for the offence of drilling men by night. According to his own account, he saved the life of three persons the rebels were about to shoot. In some unexplained way he escaped from confinement, joined the rebels again, and was caught a second time. In '98 he took advantage of the King's Pardon, married, and five years later he emigrated to America. Arriving in New York, he travelled to Montreal, thence to Quebec, and finally brought up at Gaspé. Here he got employment as a fisherman with a merchant of St. John's, Newfoundland, whom he served for five years. But bad luck pursued him. Other men prospered, but Ned Jordan seemed always to fail.

In June 1808 he appeared first in Halifax, and bought some goods from Jonathan and John Tremain, a prominent firm of merchants in those days. He was a stranger to them; they had never seen him before. No doubt he bought his goods, fisherman fashion, on credit.

In September of the same year he came again, asking for further credit, in order to complete and rig a schooner which he had on the stocks. Being prudent business



men, the Tremains wanted security, and agreed to give him the credit he asked if he would make over his incompleated vessel to them on bill of sale; and this was done. Jordan mortgaged his unfinished schooner for supplies and goods.

Early in July 1809, Jordan turned up again in Halifax with his new schooner, trying again to obtain supplies for himself and his family. In Halifax he was arrested for a small debt. This the Tremains paid and allowed him to go back to Gaspé in the *Three Sisters*, with Captain John Stairs in command. Jordan assured them that he had a thousand quintals or more of fish there, ready for shipment. Such a cargo would be more than enough to cover his debt to the firm.

At Percé, Captain Stairs found only about one hundred quintals of fish, instead of the thousand Jordan promised. The bill of sale was regularly executed, and the *Three Sisters* passed lawfully into the possession of the Tremains. Captain Stairs picked up about five hundred more quintals of fish, and, on the 10th of September, started back for Halifax, giving Jordan and his family a free passage to that port. Nothing material happened in the three days' run down the coast to the Gut of Canso, but black murder was brewing on board the dumpy, yellow-streaked schooner with the high stern and quick sheer.

Shortly before noon on the 13th, the *Three Sisters* was about three miles west of Cape Canso between that point and White Head, and four miles out to sea. This means that she was well clear of the land, and that the master was shaping his course by the outer passage for Egg Island and Halifax harbour. The wind was blowing strong off shore. Kelly the mate was at the

tiller, and all the Jordan family were on the quarter-deck. Captain Stairs went below into the cabin to get a book out of his sea-chest, and then went forward to assist the crew with the sails. He returned to the cabin for his quadrant in order to take the sun at twelve o'clock precisely, and so determine his position. Heath, his pilot, followed him down the ladder. He was turning over the leaves of the book, probably his Nautical Almanac, to get his declination, when a sudden shadow over the skylight made him look up, only to see black-faced Ned Jordan pointing a pistol at his head a few inches away. Stairs made an involuntary start, and at the same instant Jordan pulled trigger. The instinctive recoil from danger saved Captain Stairs's life. The bullet grazed his nose and cheek and lodged deep in Heath's chest. The poor fellow dropped to his knees crying, "My God! I am killed!"

One can easily picture the scene in the murky little cabin—the ear-splitting roar of the explosion within the narrow space—the acrid, choking smoke of black powder doubling the gloom—the mortally wounded man bleeding on the cabin floor—Captain Stairs probably prostrate also, but if not, stunned, blinded, deafened, with his face raw and burned. The situation he had to cope with would try the strongest nerves. The murderous assault came without the slightest warning. One moment he did not dream of danger; the next, death stared him in the face.

But the sailor's mind works quickly. His life is made up of instantaneous decisions. The safety of the ship and of all on board depends on prompt action. It took Captain Stairs but a few seconds "to recover from his fright and the effects of the powder," as he himself

put it, but he soon pulled himself together. His first thought was weapons. He rushed to his sea-chest for his pistols. They had been there ten minutes before, when he took out his Nautical Almanac, closed down the lid and turned the key in the lock. In the brief interval his chest had been broken open and his pistols were gone. He rushed for his cutlass, which hung within easy reach, at the head of his berth. It was not there. He was unarmed, in a trap, but he would not meet his fate passively. In his own words, he "determined to go on deck." His portrait shows determination written in every line of his face. He was a ship-master assaulted and braved in his own ship; he was an angry and an injured man; he "determined to go on deck." Over his head he heard several pistol shots, which he could not account for but which certainly meant danger. Jordan was shooting Matthews, the other sailor.

As Stairs began to run up the short cabin ladder, he met Jordan with his foot on the top rung, a cocked pistol in his right hand, and an axe—the broad, heavy, short-hefted hatchet of the period—in his left. He was coming down to finish the job; but doubtless he thought that Stairs was dead and that he had to deal with Heath. With a cry to spare his life, Stairs fought his way to the deck and grappled with his would-be murderer. He seized Jordan's arms and pushed him backwards. Jordan thrust the pistol against his breast and pulled trigger, but the flint merely snapped on the steel. Stairs seized the pistol by the muzzle, wrenched it out of Jordan's hand and flung it into the sea.

A wrestle for life and death ensued. On the tiny, uncertain quarter-deck, encumbered with the ship's gear and with Margaret Jordan and her children, the two



men fought and struggled for the mastery. Stairs shouted to Kelly, his mate, to help him. Kelly, the traitor, made no answer, but remained at the tiller keeping the schooner full and by, before the strong westerly breeze. Loyal Matthews, the other seaman, though desperately wounded, came staggering aft to his captain's assistance, but Jordan's bullets had gone home, and he collapsed bleeding profusely at Stairs's feet. In the swift-flying seconds Stairs had managed to wrest the axe out of Jordan's grasp, and tried to strike him with it, but now Jordan, in his turn, held his arms so that he could make no effective use of his weapon. In some way, Stairs succeeded in heaving or dropping it over the side, so that if it did not advantage him, it would not arm the man who was set on taking his life.

A second time Stairs called on his subordinate for help; but Kelly kept his place at the helm, turning his back, and, in ominous silence, went on charging his pistol, apparently the first pistol which Jordan had emptied through the skylight. Now Margaret Jordan took part in the fray, crying:

"Is it Kelly you want? I'll give you Kelly!"

The Amazon caught up a boat-hook handle, and struck Stairs several blows, without, however, doing much to disable him. He fought himself clear of both his assailants and rushed forward towards the bow of the schooner. He had time to notice Heath lying dead on the starboard side in a pool of blood. He had succeeded in crawling on deck, perhaps with the idea of aiding his captain, perhaps instinctively trying to get into the air. Mrs. Jordan had given him the final blows. Meanwhile Jordan had got hold of another axe and rushed forward

after Stairs. Poor Matthews was in his way, lying where he had fallen on the deck, bleeding from his wounds. When he saw Jordan running amuck his thoughts were not for himself. With a sailor's loyalty, he cried:

“For God's sake, don't kill the captain!”

Jordan checked in his fury for a minute to smash in the head of Matthews with four or five blows of his axe. The brief pause gave Captain Stairs another chance. By this time he had made his way back to the quarter-deck. He was literally between the devil of murder and the deep sea. His two faithful men were lying dead on the deck. His treacherous mate was aiding and abetting his would-be murderer. He had no sort of weapon to his hand, and Jordan was making swiftly for him with his bloody axe. His back was to the wall. The seaman's life is made up of instantaneous decisions. In this desperate extremity, Stairs grasped at the one desperate chance for safety.

“Finding no chance of my life if I remained on board, and that I might as well be drowned as shot, I threw the hatch overboard, jumped in after it, and got on.”

These words of Captain Stairs are perhaps not reported exactly. What happened was this. Driven into a corner, he seized the booby-hatch, the small sliding panel that closes the top of the cabin companion-way, pulled it out of its grooves, and, holding it in his hands, leaped over the taffrail into the sea. To trust his life to a little float of wood, some two or three feet square, offered the only possible way of escape; and it did not prove fallacious.

The whole struggle could only have taken a few

minutes, probably not more than five or ten. One can easily picture the fierce struggle of two contorted figures on the quarter-deck, the four frightened little children, the virago of a wife striking viciously into the mêlée with her club, the prostrate bleeding sailors, the race of Stairs round the length of the pitching, rolling schooner, until he sprang over the taffrail with his improvised life-buoy. And all the time soft-spoken John Kelly is at the tiller, keeping the schooner on her course. It is a strange scene.

Jordan's blood thirst was still unslaked, although his enemy had seemingly gone to certain death. He wanted to make sure by pistolling the man in the water, but Kelly dissuaded him, pointing out that Stairs was sure to drown so many miles from shore. Jordan forbore to fire, but afterwards he had cause to regret his weakness. The *Three Sisters* bore away to the eastward with her living and her dead, and left her late master a bobbing head among the waves. Not another sail was in sight, and the wind was blowing strong off shore. "Providentially" was a word in common use in those days. People believed in a Providence and saw the hand of God in the escape of Captain Stairs, for he was not destined to drown that September afternoon between Cape Canso and White Head. His time had not come. For three hours and a half he clung to the booby-hatch with the energy of a drowning man; and then, in his extremity, when he was "almost lifeless," he was picked up by the American fishing schooner *Eliza* of Hingham, Massachusetts, Levi Stoddard, master. To the minds of that day such an event did not seem to be the result of chance. It was arranged by an over-ruling Power. At the very



time his enemy thought he had accomplished his destruction, the rescuing vessel, though unseen, was on the way to save him.

Captain John Stairs must have been a strong man. Although "almost lifeless" when picked up, he was soon able to go on deck. He could see the *Three Sisters* a speck on the horizon, and he urged Captain Stoddard to alter his course and pursue the lost schooner. This Stoddard prudently refused to do, arguing that if damage ensued to his vessel in such an undertaking his owners would hold him responsible. Neither would he land Captain Stairs at Halifax, for the excellent reason that on his way down the coast his pilot had been impressed by the British cruiser *Bream*. When the *Eliza* was near the western end of Nova Scotia the wind was adverse, and Stairs could not be set ashore. He was carried as a passenger to Hingham. In a letter to the Tremains he writes that he will ever be indebted to the kindness and humanity of his rescuer.

As soon as possible, Captain Stairs made his way from Hingham to Boston and got into touch with the acting British consul there. This official promptly circulated a description of the *Three Sisters* and her crew to all collectors of customs, with instructions to arrest Jordan and Kelly on the charge of piracy and murder. These crimes excited great horror and indignation in Halifax, where Captain Stairs was so well known and respected. In a strongly worded proclamation, the governor offered a reward of a hundred pounds for the arrest of the murderer. These prompt measures soon brought Jordan within the grip of the law. He managed to navigate the *Three Sisters* as far as the Bay of Bulls in Newfoundland, which is near the capital St. John's. There

he engaged Patrick Power, a fellow-countryman, to take the schooner across the Atlantic to Ireland, at eleven pounds a month until discharged. During the stay at Bay of Bulls there were quarrels between Jordan and his wife and drunken orgies on board the blood-stained schooner. Jordan had succeeded in obtaining the services of a navigator, and was starting on his voyage, when he was overhauled by His Majesty's schooner *Cuttle*, and brought in irons, with his wife and children, to Halifax. Kelly had deserted his accomplice and remained on shore: but he was captured soon after by a detail of the Nova Scotia Regiment between Petty Harbour and Bay of Bulls. The Society of Merchants in St. John's gave Lieutenant Cartwright, who commanded the party, twenty guineas for capturing such a desperate character.

At Halifax, Jordan was given a most stately trial, for under the Acts of William and Mary, the Court of Admiralty convoked by special commission consisted of all the notables available. The president was the governor of the province, Sir George Prevost, who mishandled Wellington's veterans so shamefully at Plattsburg. Other members of the Court were the admiral of the station, Sir John Borlase Warren, the Chief Justice, Sampson Salter Blowers, who lived to be a hundred and never wore an overcoat, His Majesty's Council, and all the captains of His Majesty's ships which happened to be in port. It must have been a most imposing array, with every officer in full-dress uniform, and the judges in their official robes. Before the trial, Jordan and his wife were examined by a magistrate. They had concerted a flimsy tale with drink and jealousy as the leading motives. Of their

accusations Stairs could have known nothing, but his evidence in the trial tore the tissue of lies to shreds.

Jordan's trial was brief. He was found guilty, condemned to death and promptly hanged by the neck until he was dead, and then gibbeted at Black Rock, near Steele's Pond. The place is called Jordan's Bank unto this day. There he dangled in chains in sight of all vessels coming in or passing out of the harbour, as a warning to evil-doers, until his skeleton fell apart. On the opposite side of the harbour, on Mauger's Beach, there hung at the same time six mutineers of H.M.S. *Columbine*, a gruesome spectacle. When the *Saladin* pirates were on trial, thirty-five years later, Jordan's skull was picked up from the ground and is now preserved in the Provincial Museum. Kelly was tried, convicted and sentenced to death, but he was afterwards pardoned.

"His appearance on the trial was that of a simple, timid lad, and indicated nothing of the bravo," is the statement of an eye-witness. Jordan gave it as his opinion that Kelly was deranged, and, until the time of his leaving the *Three Sisters*, he threatened "to put a bad end to himself." His conduct during the fight on board the schooner seems hardly rational. Perhaps he felt remorse and fear after the deed was done. Margaret Jordan and her four children were left dependent on the charity of Halifax, but very soon enough money was collected from the charitable to pay their passage back to Ireland.

The strange experience of Captain Stairs was long remembered in Halifax. He had three hair's-breadth escapes from death on the same day—when Jordan's first bullet just grazed his cheek, when his second



pistol missed fire, and when the *Eliza* came up just in the nick of time.

Jordan's crime is quite comprehensible. A luckless, ruined man, overwhelmed with debt, he took a sudden desperate resolve to recover possession of the vessel he once owned, by plain murder. When he saw the *Three Sisters* standing away for Halifax, he made his decision. And he came within an ace of succeeding in his design. If Stairs had not started instinctively at the sight of danger, if Jordan had blown out the captain's brains instead of wounding Heath, it is more than probable that with Kelly's active or passive assistance he would have got back the *Three Sisters*. The two sailors would have been easier to dispose of than the master. In his confession he lied as valiantly as he had about his thousand quintals of fish, in order to save his wife and Kelly from the gallows. Jordan was a criminal, he had killed two men and he richly deserved his fate; and yet he shared our common humanity. It is impossible to forget that he named his last tragic venture for his three little girls; and when he saw the *Cuttle* bearing down, "his uneasiness became excessive, and he said, 'The Lord have mercy on me! What will my poor children do!'"





# THE SACK OF LUNENBURG

*There rose a shriek as of a city sack'd.*

## I

### FOREWORD OF HISTORY

THE town of Lunenburg in Nova Scotia was founded in 1753 with immigrants from the Lower Rhine, the Palatinate, and the Protestant stronghold Montbéliard on the border of Switzerland. It was named for the ancient city of Lüneberg in Hanover, and it represented the policy of the British Government to people the province with Protestant settlers as a counterpoise to the French. Founded in a lull between two wars, when war was still regarded as a law of Nature, the site of the new town was selected with an eye to easy defence. It stands on a narrow hog's-back isthmus of a peninsula jutting far into the sea. The town itself was laid out as a small compact oblong of twelve streets crossing at right angles. Towards the nose of the peninsula seaward, two large parcels of land were set apart as commons and a series of garden-plots. On the landward side, beyond the isthmus, the farms were allotted on a generous scale. Each worthy settler received a town-lot, a garden-lot, a thirty-acre lot and a hundred-acre farm. Chance decided the holdings, as the settlers drew from a pack of cards. Some of these cards are still occasionally produced as evidence in law-suits.



Three blockhouses, a pentagon fort with barracks, and a line of pickets protected the town on the west. Another blockhouse crowning a steep hill, one hundred and thirty-five feet above the water, defended the eastern flank. With adequate arms, a resolute garrison and fortifications in repair, Lunenburg should have proved a miniature Gibraltar.

This settlement has suffered many things. Even before the Seven Years' War broke out in 1756, Indians attacked the outlying farms, shooting, tomahawking, scalping helpless women and children, till the terror-stricken farmers abandoned their farms and took refuge in the town. Then, after a short decade of peace, the American Revolution came, bringing to the Lunenburgers, as to the rest of the province, scarcity, high prices, danger from enemy action. Their greatest hardship was the attack of the "rebels" in the last year of the war, when American privateers were most numerous and active. In 1775, two Yankee cruisers raided Charlottetown; Annapolis Royal was surprised and plundered in 1781; but the attack on Lunenburg is the best remembered and the most famous in the annals of the province.

## II

### THE SURPRISE

At dawn on the 1st of July, 1782, Magdalena Schwartz on Myra's Island went out to milk her cow. Hearing a noise, she looked up and saw a large band of armed men coming over the hill and trampling down her patch

of barley. She dropped her pail in her fright, ran to the house and told her husband Leonard. At once he started to give the alarm, and, though fired at in crossing Rous's Brook, reached the town in safety. The enemy were close at his heels. In a few minutes every soul was awakened by the crackle of musketry fire about the eastern blockhouse. Fear and confusion reigned. What had happened?

The night before, Captain Weiderholt came in from Halifax and told Leonard Schwartz, "The Yankees are coming to-morrow." The warning went unheeded, but the Yankees did come as predicted. During the night six sail of privateers had landed a party of ninety men at Redhead, inside the harbour, two miles from the town, and at sunrise the invaders were on the march to attack it.

The flagship of the hostile flotilla was the big top-sail schooner *Scammell* of sixteen guns and sixty men. She was commanded by Noah Stoddard, a fitting name for a sailor. Like Lambro, "this sea-solicitor" was a genial pirate. His vessel was commissioned in April, and his first exploit, in company with the *Lively* privateer, Captain Adams, was rescuing the officers and crew of H.M.S. *Blonde* wrecked on Great Seal Island. The *Blonde* was a smart frigate, new coppered and "sailing swift as the wind," says the veracious *Gazette*; but the *Blonde's* high hopes of captures and prize-money were dashed. Some sixty American prisoners were on board when she was wrecked, but they escaped. Noah treated his unfortunate enemies with the greatest humanity, sending them back to Halifax and furnishing them with passes to secure them from molestation by other privateersmen. In the long black record of privateers'

brutality, such a deed shines like gold. Now Admiral Noah was directing with great skill a combined attack by sea and land upon a hostile provincial town. His "operations" are a good example, on a small scale, of what the strategists call amphibious warfare.

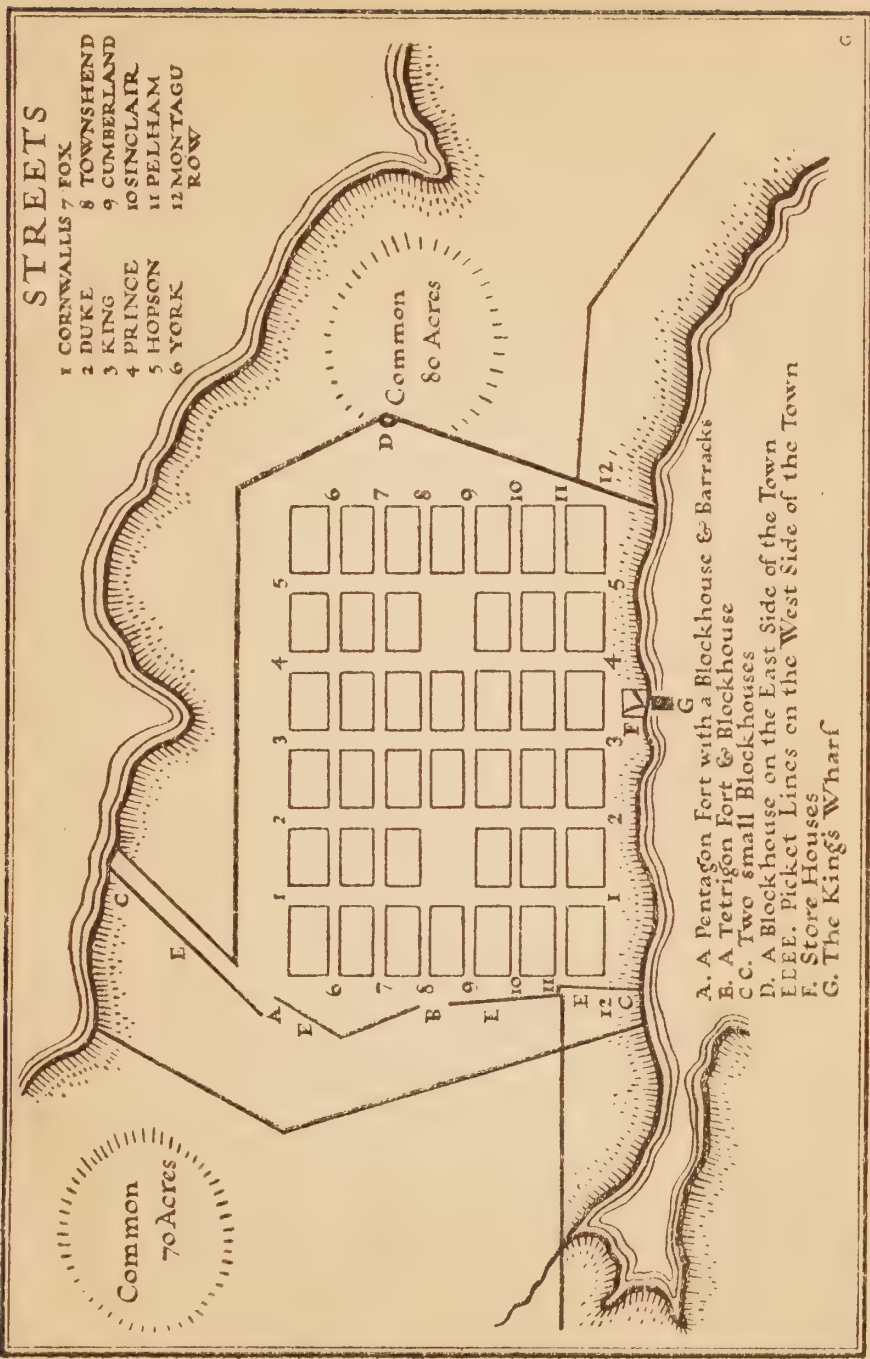
The other vessels were the Massachusetts schooner *Hero*, nine guns and twenty-five men, George Waitstill Babcock, master; the Massachusetts schooner *Dolphin*, eight guns and thirty men, Greag Power, master; the Massachusetts brigantine *Hope*, six guns and thirty-five men, Herbert Woodbury, master; the New Hampshire cutter *Swallow*, five guns and twenty men, John Tibbets, master; and a small row-galley of unknown armament and crew. According to Major Pernette—and he is confirmed by the *Boston Gazette*—the expedition was organised in Boston for the express purpose of attacking Lunenburg.

The Americans were in overwhelming force. Lunenburg contained at that time no more than forty or fifty dwelling-houses; many of the inhabitants were absent. When the old, the invalids, and the children are omitted from the muster, there could not have been more than twenty men available for the defence. Still there was a show of resistance. The first citizen was undoubtedly Colonel John Creighton, who had seen service as a lieutenant in the British Army during the war of the Austrian Succession, and had been wounded at Fontenoy. The privateersmen planned to surround his house, which was near the blockhouse, and secure him first; but his servant saw the enemy advancing along the road across the common, and warned his master. Such casual warning should not have been necessary. The eastern blockhouse had a night-guard,



# STREETS

- 1 CORNWALLIS 7 FOX
- 2 DUKE 8 TOWNSHEND
- 3 KING 9 CUMBERLAND
- 4 PRINCE 10 SINCLAIR
- 5 HOPSON 11 PELHAM
- 6 YORK 12 MONTAGU ROW



- A. A Pentagon Fort with a Blockhouse & Barracks
- B. A Tetragon Fort & Blockhouse
- C. Two small Blockhouses
- D. A Blockhouse on the East Side of the Town
- E. Picket Lines on the West Side of the Town
- F. Store Houses
- G. The King's Wharf

OLD PLAN OF LUNENBURG  
*(Preserved in the Province House, Halifax)*



which should have remained at their post until properly relieved, but with the lax discipline of militia-men, they had gone off at dawn and left the blockhouse undefended. Into this deserted strong-point the old colonel hurried with five men, and opened fire on the attackers. His faithful black servant, Sylvia, did yeoman service, carrying cartridge and ball in her apron to the fort from the colonel's dwelling near by. When the musket balls rattled against the walls of the Creighton house she sheltered the colonel's son with her body. Sylvia was something of a heroine. Tradition has it that she helped to load the muskets in the blockhouse and even fire them. Some of the bullets found their billet, for at least three of the invaders were winged, and one severely wounded.

How long the tiny garrison of the blockhouse held out is not clear from the records. The first landing party was speedily reinforced. Having impressed three Lunenburgers as pilots, the privateers were soon descried sailing round East Point. Without mishap, they all reached the inner harbour, anchored in face of the town, and landed another strong detachment, with four ship's guns. Their objective was the undefended blockhouse to the west of the town. Two parties rushed to the two batteries at the ends of the picket-line, spiked the two twenty-four-pounders, and rolled them with their cannon-balls down the steep banks. They established themselves as a main guard on Blockhouse Hill, which commanded the whole neck of land leading from the town to the country, and they planted the guns from the ships so as to sweep the streets. Lunenburg was now completely cut off from the surrounding district, the landing parties strongly occupying



both flanks, and the menacing flotilla at anchor in the harbour. The attack was a brilliant success, and a credit to the staff work of Admiral Noah Stoddard.

Further resistance was useless. Colonel Creighton in the eastern blockhouse had no choice but surrender. He and two of his men were taken prisoner, marched down to the King's Wharf, and put on board the *Scammell*. Faithful Sylvia was allowed to escape. The defence of the blockhouse that July morning was a small affair, and there has been a tendency to view it in a humorous light; but, as Montaigne says, a man may show as much courage in dislodging a musketeer from a hen-roost as in slaying a champion in the sight of two armies. Later in the day the Reverend Pierre de la Roche, with other leading citizens, went on board the *Scammell* to beg for the colonel's release, but in vain. Captain Stoddard bore his prisoner no ill will. After the war he sent kind inquiries by a Haligonian about the family of his late enemy, and stated that he had "a great regard for the old gentleman."

The only other show of resistance was at Major D. C. Jessen's house. The major was a Holsteiner, who came to Nova Scotia in 1752. He held various civil posts in Lunenburg, amongst others, collector of imposts and excise. He made a stout defence, single-handed, of his home. The windows were smashed by musket bullets, and the door was being beaten in when he escaped by the back. Many years afterwards, when his house became Hirtle's tavern, bullet holes were still visible. He got safely out of the town, collected a number of militia-men and took post on the hill behind the town. He paid for the obstinacy of his defence. The privateersmen looted the greatest part of his best furniture,

his plate and all his clothes, besides a good deal of his money. The statement that he lost a large sum of public money collected for impost and excise he promptly contradicted in the *Nova Scotia Gazette*. His quarterly accounts had been regularly made up, sent to Halifax and paid in there. The robbers got only a few shillings of government money, he declares, but he himself lost property valued at seven hundred pounds. That he did not suffer greater loss was due to Sylvia, who once more showed her pluck and mother-wit. After her escape from the blockhouse, she went to Major Jessen's house and packed his money and plate in a small chest. She wore very long skirts, and, when the privateersmen came to ransack the house, she sat down on the chest and covered it completely with her ample draperies. She feigned to be badly frightened, screaming and crying with true African abandon. One man said, "See what's under the old thing," whereat Sylvia redoubled her cries of distress. The leader said, "Let the black hag go," and the marauders went on. Then Sylvia bestowed the chest in the well, which the raiders had previously examined for loot. All that these picaroons gleaned at Major Jessen's was a small silver cream-jug and a few other trifling articles. The cream-jug has a history. The raiding party went on to another house, and one man took off his jacket with the jug in it, and put on the militia tunic belonging to the master of the house. He forgot to transfer the jug, and this relic of the raid is preserved by one of the old Lunenburg families until this day.

## III

## THE SACK

“The victorious party with a natural and pleasing vivacity fell to plundering,” says the *Boston Gazette*, in its gleeful but imaginative account of the affair. It was not the pleasing aspect of the “vivacity” that struck the Lunenburgers. They were terrified, and knew not what to expect. Some fled to the country; some made attempts at defence; some took cover; some tried to hide their valuables. The whole town was in the greatest confusion. The privateersmen entered the stores and the principal houses, taking what they wanted. Arms were the particular object of their search. These they either beat to pieces or kept for themselves. They showed a special fancy for the scarlet regimentals of the militia, and the silver-hilted dress swords. The shops were full of new spring goods—Foster’s, Bohlman’s, Wollenhaupt’s, Knaut’s heirs’—and these they swept clean, as well as half a dozen others. Dry-goods, provisions, gunpowder, whatever would be useful to them was carried on board their vessels. The king’s stores beside the wharf yielded rich booty in ration beef, pork and flour. The powder and ammunition from the magazine were transferred to the *Scammell’s* hold. Twenty puncheons of “good West India rum” mentioned by the *Boston Gazette* must have been welcome. All day the Americans must have been as busy as nailers, transporting their plunder down the narrow steep streets to the King’s Wharf, ferrying it out in their boats to the anchored vessels,



and stowing it below hatches. The stevedore job could not be carelessly done.

The town itself was a spectacle. What the Americans did not want they destroyed, or left lying about. An eye-witness reported the narrow streets "strown with laces, ribbons, cottons, and many other kinds of shop-goods." And the Lunenburgers were forced to look on helplessly at the wanton destruction of their property. One class of the community profited by the invasion—the small boys. To them the privateersmen were "very generous"—their generosity cost them nothing—giving them raisins and cakes and other goodies from the shops, no doubt to their huge delight. The "pleasing vivacity" of the privateersmen showed itself also in a sort of impromptu masquerade. The wild-looking invaders, in their loose slop trousers and belts stuck full of pistols, donned the red militia uniform tunics and stuck cocked hats, and women's bonnets, and mob-caps on their heads. The raid had a comic aspect to the raiders themselves.

There is another item on the credit side of the ledger for the raiders. No woman was outraged or insulted, nor was any of the inhabitants assaulted or hurt. The *Boston Gazette* is correct in stating that "the strictest decorum was observed towards the inhabitants." There was one mild exception. Through the scenes of confusion moved the tall lank form of the Reverend Johann Gottlob Schmeisser, in his strange, foreign, clerical garments, doing his duty as a man of God by expostulating gravely with the invaders and trying to stop the pillaging. But he was fresh from Germany, he had assumed his charge only two months before, and, as his expostulations were in his native tongue, they had

little effect. Still he made himself a nuisance, and a squad of impatient Yankees laid hands on him. He resigned himself to torture or death, but they only roped him, hands and feet, and left him lying like a trussed fowl in the middle of the Parade. His years as a theological student at Halle could hardly have prepared him for such an experience in the wilds of America.

## IV

## THE RANSOM

While the privateersmen were working their will on the captured town, measures for its relief were being taken in two different directions. Early in the morning, two men had started from the Back Harbour in an open boat to carry the news to Halifax. Desbrisay says they did not reach their destination until Monday evening, which seems probable, for the distance to be covered was thirty-four miles, a long row. The Massachusetts *Spy* reports that armed ships started for Lunenburg the same day. As soon as intelligence reached Halifax, "the most surprising exertions were made in fitting out the *Cornwallis* and two armed brigs, though they were in a manner totally unrigged, and their guns and stores out, yet they sailed for the relief of Lunenburg on Monday (read Tuesday?) forenoon. Since which another armed vessel has sailed." This was commanded by Captain Douglass of the *Chatham*. The *Albacore* and another armed vessel commanded by Captain Rupert D. George of the *Charlestown*, poor

Evans's frigate, followed with two hundred Hessians from the regiment of Baron de Seitz. Everything possible was done, but the force arrived too late. This is evidently the "near approach of the combined fleet" which the Massachusetts *Gazette* refers to as taking place on the Monday and motivating the retreat of the privateer flotilla.

Some ten miles to the westward as the crow flies, at La Have Ferry, was Major Joseph Pernette, an old soldier who had served, like Colonel Creighton, at Fontenoy. He heard of the attack only about noon by word of mouth, as the fugitives from Lunenburg spread the alarm throughout the countryside. He went down in a boat to the Five Houses, and ordered the two twelve-pounders there to be fired, in order to alarm the militia in the harbour. He gives as his reason for not acting earlier that there was no firing of great guns from Lunenburg. In the next war, when another American privateer appeared at the harbour mouth, the cannon at all the points, Kingsburg, Fort Boscawen and the rest, were fired at once, and set the militia-men in motion without delay. As soon as Major Pernette had assembled twenty men, he marched on Lunenburg, leaving orders for the rest to follow as fast as possible. But the roads were bad, and in spite of his efforts, it was not till after four that he effected a junction with Major Jessen, who was awaiting reinforcements on the hill outside the town. The two officers were concerting their plan of attack, when a messenger came post-haste from the town, begging them not to make any move for the relief of the inhabitants, as the Americans had threatened to burn down every house in the place if the attempt were made. Colonel Creighton's



house was actually going up in flames. Admiral Noah had demanded a ransom. In the last hour of the American occupation was carried out one of the strangest commercial transactions on record. Three of the leading citizens of Lunenburg, the Reverend Pierre de la Roche, "Ang. Presb." as he signs himself, from Geneva, Caspar Wollenhaupt and John Bohlman, owners of the gutted shops, signed a promissory note for one thousand pounds in favour of Noah Stoddard, payable at Halifax (of all places) in thirty days. How "this sea-solicitor" expected to collect his money is a mystery. At all events, the note was signed by the three representatives of the town; Majors Pernette and Jessen held their hand; and about five o'clock, from their post of vantage on the hill, they saw the motley flotilla sail out of the harbour "deeply loaded with plunder." From the raiders' point of view the invasion was a brilliant success. Their plan of attack was executed without a hitch, they lost no men, and they got away safely with loot valued variously from eight thousand to twelve thousand pounds. "The brave sons of liberty" had taught "the abettors of oppression and despotism" a lesson not soon to be forgotten.

But they left trouble in their wake. The Lunenburgers begged Lieutenant-Governor Hammond for soldiers to protect them, and he had none to spare for an outpost. They were left a prey to fears. The three signatories of the promise to pay protested publicly that they had no means of meeting their obligation. Their fellow-townsmen were in the same case. So the town lived in constant apprehension, for "rebel" privateers were always hovering about the coast, until Captain Bethell arrived in the fall with a detachment

## THE SACK OF LUNENBURG

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of troops. By the end of the year the war was over and the cloud of anxiety lifted. That black Monday must have been the strangest, the most eventful, and the most vivid in the whole history of Lunenburg. The record reads like a milder page from the history of the Thirty Years' War.







## THE "TEAZER" LIGHT

THE pleasant little town of Chester lies in the pocket of Mahone Bay, the largest bight in the deeply indented coastline of Nova Scotia. Across the mouth, this bay measures ten miles; and it is the same distance from the sentinel Tancook seaward to the tongue of land on which Chester is built. This broad and deep bight is sown thick with islands. Great and small, they number more than three hundred. In truth, the bay is a gulf embracing an archipelago. The bay, the islands, the town with its background of rolling hills are justly famed for their beauty. Chester has become a favourite summer resort. The very name suggests boating, sailing, bathing, all healthful pleasures of the open air, but few of the golfers, hotel guests and summer boarders ever think of the tragic scenes once enacted here.

Who remembers how the raiding Melicites shot Louis Payzant dead at the door of his own house, in the time of the Seven Years' War, and dragged away his wife and four little children to years of captivity in Quebec? That night Chester Basin was lit up by the flames of his burning house, and gave the alarm to the garrison at Lunenburg. When Sutherland's men reached the spot they found only smoking ruins and scalped and bloody corpses. These waters were still more luridly illuminated on the night of 26th June, 1813, when a burst of fire against the dark bulk of Tancook signalled the destruction of a fighting ship and nearly all her

crew. The tale lives vaguely in the popular memory: but it has never been fully told.

It is a tale of battles long ago. When the war of 1812 broke out the United States had no navy beyond a handful of smart and formidable frigates. They soon made a name for themselves, and their exploits are written large in their country's annals. But their victories in single ship duels did not affect the issue. Britain, Mistress of the Seas, at once concentrated a huge naval force at Halifax, blockaded the whole Atlantic seaboard, and killed American commerce dead. There were no fewer than one hundred and six of His Britannic Majesty's ships on this station in 1813; some twenty were line-of-battle ships, seventy-fours, and the rest frigates, sloops and light craft of every rating. Against such overwhelming force the Americans could make no head. They took the usual course of the weaker antagonist and fell back on a policy of raids and commerce destroying. Privateering was especially attractive to practical patriots. You served your country against the tyrants of the ocean, and at the same time you filled your pockets. Yankee privateers ranged the seas. When Scott took his trip with Stevenson's grandfather inspecting the lighthouses round the northern islands, one of the risks they ran was encountering American private vessels of war.

When war was declared, New York promptly unleashed a mosquito fleet of twenty-four sail. They had the usual luck of privateers. Generally they were immensely successful, sending in many prizes, for they preyed on helpless merchantmen and kept their distance from the fighting ships; but some few were run down, captured and destroyed. Among these latter was the

schooner *Teazer*, of eighty-eight tons burthen, mounting two guns and carrying a crew of fifty officers and men. She was commanded by Charles W. Wooster, and her commission is dated 2nd July, 1812. It is hardly probable that whoever christened her was a student of the Elizabethan drama, and had in mind the significance of the name three hundred years ago. Then "teazers" were the two hounds first uncoupled from the pack against the deer. As the old play has it:

The lofty frolic bucks  
That scudded 'fore the teasers like the wind.

Or it may have indicated more obviously the intention to annoy and distress the enemies of the republic. In either case the name was apt. The *Teazer* was active and enterprising; she captured no fewer than two full-rigged ships, six brigs and six schooners. All but one of these valuable prizes reached an American port. They must have yielded handsome returns to the *Teazer's* owners, and liberal prize-money to the *Teazer's* crew.

Then in December 1812, the *Teazer* was caught in the wide net spread by the North Atlantic fleet, and fell a prey to the *San Domingo*, seventy-four, the flagship of Sir John Borlase Warren. She was taken and burnt. Her end was in a pillar of smoke and flame upon the face of the waters; but she had an exciting run for her prize money. The *Teazer's* officers and men were made prisoners, and sent home as soon as possible in a "cartel" ship. The officers were paroled; that is, they gave a written promise that they would not serve against Great Britain again until regularly exchanged for a British officer of corresponding rank. That was



the way they played the war game in those great and gallant days. An officer was assumed to be a man of honour, and his word was as good as his bond, but the sequel shows at least one exception to the rule. Among the officers paroled was the first lieutenant, Frederick Johnson, who replaced Captain Wooster on 26th November, and was in command of the *Teazer* at the time of her capture.

Undeterred by the loss of one ship, Samuel Adams of New York applied on 3rd May, 1813, for a letter of marque licensing another, the schooner *Young Teazer*, to proceed in warlike manner against the enemies of the United States. She was not apparently a peaceful vessel, hastily prepared for fighting, but built especially for the privateering trade. She was a much more formidable craft than her predecessor. She was a fine under-cut model and built of the best American oak, with masts of Norway pine, and she measured one hundred and twenty-four tons. She was coppered, which shows she was intended for service in tropical waters; she was painted black; and she bore the significant figure-head of a carved alligator. Her bulwarks were filled in with a backing of cork, up to the rails, to limit the damage and wounds caused by the flying splinters when the round-shot smashed through the planking. She was a fast sailer, and could be rowed with her sixteen sweeps at five miles an hour, which must have meant sweating galley-slave work for the two men at each huge oar. Her armament consisted of a Long Tom, mounted on a swivel forward, which could be trained in any direction, another large gun on deck, probably also a Long Tom, and three others. With her speed and her five guns, and her crew of



sixty-five well provided with small arms, she was an overmatch for almost any British merchantman she might decide to chase.

Apparently the entire ship's company transferred to the new venture. Certainly Frederick Johnson did, in his old capacity as first lieutenant. The sailor's affection for his perilous floating home induced someone to name the new craft the *Young Teazer* in reminiscence of the privateer destroyed by the *San Domingo*. The same sentiment is discernible in Richard Peter Tonge christening the captured cutter *Greyhound* the *Little Jack*, after the vessel which he lost in the fight with La Pérouse off Spanish River on 21st July, 1781. A new captain, one William B. Dobson, took command. In the narrative he appears for one vivid moment, and then vanishes for ever.

The *Young Teazer's* career was even briefer than that of the parent ship and her end was much more tragic. Her letter of marque is dated 3rd May, 1813. Probably her papers were made out and the legal formalities completed only a short time before she was ready to sail, with all her "furniture," supplies, powder and shot for her great guns and small arms, and the thousand oddments needed in a fighting ship intended to keep the sea.

Evidently she lost no time in taking the war-path. Early in June she was at Portland, Maine. Here Mr. Fullerton Merrill, home on furlough, joined her, in some semi-official capacity, for the sake of the adventure. On the third of the month the privateer sailed from the last friendly port she was ever to enter, and was soon thrusting her audacious alligator head through the dangerous coastal waters of Nova Scotia, and running

the gauntlet of the countless British cruisers. There was danger enough. Man-o'-war's men regarded privateers of their own flag as little better than pirates, while foreign privateers were simply marine reptiles to be destroyed without mercy. On 11th June, Halifax learned through the *Weekly Chronicle*, that two days before a Liverpool vessel had been boarded off La Have by the American privateer *Young Teazer*, but being in ballast, was suffered to proceed as a prize not worth taking. Halifax was also correctly informed as to the daring raider's tonnage, crew and number of guns.

Before the 11th, she had snapped up a brig and a schooner "off the light-house," that is near Sambro Island, at the very entrance to Halifax harbour, almost under the guns of the forts. Legend has it that she dashed into the harbour itself, and escaped capture by hoisting British colours. This was certainly putting your head in the lion's mouth, but the *Young Teazer* was capable of such bravado.

By this time she had attracted the particular attention of several vessels which earnestly desired a closer acquaintance with her. One of the famous Liverpool privateers, the eighteen-gun brig *Sir John Sherbrooke*, Captain Joseph Freeman, gave the *Young Teazer* a hot chase, but lost her in the fog. Later a "Teazer" in Lunenburg jail regretted this escape; to one of the *Sherbrooke's* crew he said, "We saw you after us, and it would have been well had you taken us." The *Castor* frigate, and the *Manly*, brig-of-war, fourteen guns, were also most assiduous in their attentions, but the speedy little Yankee had the heels of them all.

Then came the unforeseen end of her three weeks' cruise, and the close of the fifth act.

Saturday, 26th June, 1813, was a day of great excitement for the people of Lunenburg and Chester. In the afternoon two vessels were descried from Blockhouse Hill entering Lunenburg harbour. From that point, one hundred and thirty-three feet above the sea level, the two sail were plainly visible some five miles away. It was a most alarming sight. The whole world was at war, and had been at war for nearly a quarter of a century. Square sails in the offing might mean an enemy. In the last war did not Captain Noah Stoddard and his merry men from six American privateers land and capture Lunenburg? Did they not plunder that ancient town, and hold it to ransom? The two vessels might mean a second invasion. The Americans might be returning to foreclose their mortgage on the town. Or it might be the French. Nobody knew the truth. Alarm guns were fired immediately from Blockhouse Hill, from Fort Boscawen, from Lower La Have and from Kingsburg.

Obedient to the summons, the well-organised local militia at once got under arms and from all the countryside hurried to the points of rendezvous. Captain John Heckman commanding the guard on Blockhouse Hill followed the movements of the vessels throughout that long June day, and so did many others. They saw an exciting chase.

One of the vessels was the *Young Teazer*, now, though she knew it not, at the end of her tether. When off Lunenburg and proceeding eastward, apparently, she saw a sail to windward. It was a day of light airs with a gentle dying breeze from the westward. In the vague distance the square sails of the frigate *Orpheus* showed as a white pyramid that neared and neared. On board



the *Young Teazer* all hands were called to make sail, which must mean set extra "kites," and to sweat at the sweeps. In this desert of ocean no American privateer could hope to meet a friend, and any amount of hard work was better than prison at Halifax, or in a hulk off Melville Island.

True to the ancient practice of American privateers, the *Young Teazer* dodged into Lunenburg harbour, where a ship of heavier draft could not easily follow her. In the maze of islands and shoals she might elude pursuit. But the *Orpheus* followed hot on her trail, and the Yankee doubled like a hare, first over to the westward, past Sculpin Rock—a danger in mid-channel—into Spindler's Cove. There Captain Dobson put his helm over, and out went the privateer with a fair wind, towing her boat astern, between Cross Island and East Point into Mahone Bay towards Tancook. The *Orpheus* was becalmed and could not follow her in.

About two o'clock another square-rigger was sighted to leeward. This was no other than the huge three-decker *La Hogue*, of seventy-four guns, carrying every stitch of sail she could get aloft. If the lumbering seawaggon could only close with her tiny quarry, she would just make one mouthful of her; but it took half a gale to move the line-of-battle ship, while the smart little Yankee schooner walked along to the lightest breeze; besides she had man-power for her sweeps. All the same, *La Hogue* must have had a lucky slant of wind, for she too worked to windward of the *Young Teazer*, and got close enough to fire several guns at her.

About four o'clock, both Britishers took the wind of the privateer and compelled her to run into Mahone Bay. There she was trapped, land-locked, caught



between the upper and the nether mill-stone. Her last hour was near. The fickle breeze died away, as it does in June afternoons, and all three ships floated motionless on the placid waters. Perhaps the privateer might have worked away into safety with her sweeps, but *La Hogue* had another trick up her sleeve. She anchored at half-past seven in ten fathoms of water, and called her boats away.

Five of them, each with a gun in the bow and filled with armed men, dropped from the davits and began to race towards the doomed privateer. By this time it was near nine o'clock, the sun had set seventeen minutes before eight, but the long summer twilight was not at an end. On came the five heavy boats. The rhythmic thrash of the oars and their rattle of the rowlocks must have been heard by the "Teazers" in the still June evening; they could see the five dim purposeful shapes approaching three short sea-miles away.

On board the privateer there were doubts and divided counsels. Captain William C. Dobson at the tiller, with his speaking-trumpet in hand, called his officers on deck to consider their best course. Should they fight against overwhelming odds, with no quarter given when the British tars, cutlass in hand, swarmed over the side? Should they haul down their flag? Or should they abandon their ship and trust to the friendly natives on shore, as so many other Americans had done in days gone by, and not been disappointed?

A resolute captain could have made a good fight. With her heavy guns, the *Young Teazer* might have picked off one or more of the attacking boats at long range, reserving the fire of the others for close quarters. The crew were probably standing by their sweeps. On

the fo'c'sle head were the boatswain, Elisha Gunnison, and several others of the crew.

A council of war never fights.

Captain Dobson is still at the tiller halting between two opinions, with his speaking-trumpet in his hand, when his decision is made for him. In the summer dusk, a sailor suddenly cried out that Lieutenant Johnson had gone into the cabin with a coal of fire. The warning came too late. The next moment the watchers on shore saw a huge burst of flame shoot skyward and heard the roar of a tremendous explosion. Johnson, who had broken his parole, and did not fancy swinging at the yard-arm of *La Hogue*, had fired the *Young Teazer's* magazine.

The strange spectacle to seaward did nothing to allay the excitement on shore. No one could be sure of what had happened. There might still be danger of an attack. So Haliburton records that the militiamen lay on their arms all night. *La Hogue* burnt a blue light to recall her boats. They returned to the ship about midnight, bringing the dead body of a privateersman. On Sunday morning she sent a boat back to the scene of the explosion. The *Young Teazer* was found afloat, with many dead bodies about her. But the people on shore could know nothing of these transactions. Only when a boat came round East Point into Lunenburg harbour and up to Lunenburg town, that same Sunday morning, could there be certain tidings. It was loaded with the wounded, shaken survivors of the privateer. Dr. Bolman amputated one man's leg; another, badly injured, died. Lunenburg lock-up received them. The same day Elisha Gunnison made his deposition before Francis Rudolph and John

Creighton, Esquires, Justices of the Peace, and on this sworn testimony is based the present account of the *Young Teazer's* last moments and death agony. Of her full crew, only thirty-six were on board at the time of her destruction. The rest had been sent off in her various prizes, the *Ann*, the *Greyhound*, the *Invincible Napoleon* and the three schooners.

The blast of the fired magazine tore the deck, the mainmast and the cabin out of her, slew outright twenty-eight of the thirty-six and flung Gunnison and his mates from the bow into the water. But the wreck still floated. One man swam to the boat astern, cut the painter, and picked up his friends. They rowed to the nearest land, which was Anschutz's (now Rafuse) Island, and surrendered to Martin Rafuse, who delivered them duly next day to the authorities at Lunenburg.

Johnson's action was severely condemned by his compatriots at the time. By 23rd July, New York heard of it with disapproval.

"Had he blown his brains out or tied a gun about his neck and flung himself overboard, very few would have mourned and no one would have found fault, as by all accounts he was not the most amiable man living. Indeed he must have been possessed of the disposition of a devil to plunge such a number of his friends into eternity, who had parents, wives and children to mourn their untimely fate, and to suffer for want of protection and assistance."

To prefer the swift fire-death to tame surrender is heroic; but Johnson's desperate deed hardly comes under that head. He must have acted on a sudden impulse when he snatched the live brand from the



galley fire. Perhaps he would not take the consequences of breaking his parole; perhaps he was possessed of a devil, as already suggested; perhaps he was simply irritated by his superior officer's indecision. His state of mind remains a riddle.

The sudden destruction of the *Young Teazer* made a deep impression on the whole community. Many had been the watchers on the shore, who had followed the chase, who saw and heard the explosion. The wreck was towed up to Nauss's Island (Norse in the Admiralty chart), drawn ashore there and sold. The gutted hull, burned, blackened, strewn with bloody fragments of human bodies, was a sickening sight. John Pentz fainted at the ghastly spectacle. Those who saw it and took the mutilated bodies ashore for Christian burial could not have soon forgotten their experience. There were mute reminders of the tragedy. Part of the *Young Teazer's* American oak hull was built into one of George Mitchell's stores. A piece of the keel, fashioned into a cross, is preserved in the chancel of the Anglican church at Chester. Joseph Zinck at Blandford has one of the privateer's lanterns. Tradition says that Gunnison, who lost a leg, begged at the door of the Presbyterian church in Lunenburg for a year.

Curious jetsam was brought ashore, such as a basket containing baby's clothing, a pair of scissors, a needle-case. A number of books were salvaged, one of which was called *Care-Killer*, no doubt a Joe Miller of the familiar type. Such things could hardly have been part of the privateer's original "furniture"; they represented plunder from her prizes.

The memory of the *Young Teazer* has not yet passed away. School-children of Lunenburg repeat the tale



"authorised by their grandam," and point out to one another where the *Young Teazer* went down. The belated fisherman in his dory, overtaken by fog or night, still reports the apparition of a blazing ship in the gloom. She nears and nears; and then blows up and vanishes. Or out by Tancook a "fire ship" appears with men in cocked-hats and strange old-fashioned array. The ghost of the privateer, a local "flying Dutchman," still haunts the coast she raided so audaciously more than a century ago.





## THE DISCIPLINE OF H.M.S. "ATALANTE"

ALL the world remembers the story of the *Birkenhead*, and how British soldiers and sailors ranked on the sinking deck went down with the ship, while the women and children were saved in the boats. In *The Book of Golden Deeds* the wreck of the *Atalante* is coupled with it, as another shining example of British obedience and discipline. But who can tell when, and where, the *Atalante* was wrecked? Who recalls her name? Even the city at whose gateway she was lost has forgotten her story.

On the morning of 10th November, 1813, His Majesty's Ship *Atalante*, under jib and double-reefed topsails, was creeping along the coast towards Halifax in a typical Nova Scotia fog, so dense that the look-out could not see the ship's length into it. According to the navy classification of that day, she was a sloop-of-war, the rate below a frigate, mounting sixteen guns, and carrying a complement of one hundred and thirty-four officers and men. Her "portrait" in *The Naval Chronicle* shows a trim little craft in the strict profile so dear to the seaman's eye, with every stitch of canvas set and every sheet taut. She was the sort of ship every smart captain in those days was ambitious to command, a French prize; for our "natural enemies" were by far the better naval architects. Sixteen years before, she had fallen a prey to the famous *Phæbe* frigate, Captain Barlow,

off the Scillies. Designed for speed rather than for fighting power, she would be employed in scouting, carrying dispatches and such light work. She bore the name of the fleet-footed maiden in the Greek myth, and evidently deserved it. Just now she formed part of the huge naval force which, based on Halifax, was blockading the whole American coast and was strangling American sea-borne trade, as Hawthorne has shown in one of his unforgettable New England sketches.

On the previous Thursday, the *Atalante* was on station off New London, Connecticut. At ten o'clock that morning, as her captain, Frederick Hickey, testified with naval preciseness, he got orders from the senior officer, Captain Oliver of the *Valiant*, seventy-four, to proceed to Halifax with public letters and dispatches for the commander-in-chief. They were of special importance, as they related to the movements of the enemy, who was believed to be ready to put to sea at all risks. The "enemy" was the handful of American frigates which ultimately broke through the cordon of blockade. The king's business required haste. Besides, the *Atalante* was in no condition to weather a gale; her cables had been surveyed and condemned; and she was so short of provisions that the purser, Mr. Inderwick, was ordered to put officers and crew on two-thirds allowance of bread.

Nothing of importance occurred until the *Atalante* made the coast of Nova Scotia. On the Sunday, an observation had been taken and the ship's position fixed in correspondence with the chart. Then the thick grey Atlantic fog shut down and blinded her. The last land seen was somewhere between Cape Sable and Shelburne. For two more short days and two more long



nights in gloom and darkness, the little *Atalante* stood on to her appointed end. This was her last voyage.

If risks were to be run, Captain Hickey was the man to run them. Time and again he had worked his way along this dangerous coast, blindfold, and made port safely. He was no green hand, but a cautious and skilful navigator of six-and-twenty years' experience. For more than six of them he had commanded the *Atalante*. His officers and crew had seen him extricate his able little craft from perilous situations not a few. He had sailed her in and out of Halifax harbour in all weathers, anchoring safely inside when neither shore could be distinguished. He had a well-disciplined crew, "attentive, obedient, respectful" to the last, as he testified at his court-martial; and he took every precaution that skill and experience could suggest. Sail was reduced to a minimum; the deep-sea lead was kept going; a sharp look-out was maintained. The importance of the *Atalante's* errand would justify any hazard.

As she neared the dangerous approaches of the harbour, precautions were redoubled. In addition to the regular look-out on the forecastle, John Holdock, A.B., was stationed at the jib-boom end. John Calder, captain of the forecastle, was heaving the lead in the forechains. Captain Hickey was in consultation with Mr. Pulling, the sailing-master, on the quarter-deck, frequently hailing the forecastle and enjoining the men there to keep a sharp look-out. Aids to navigation along the coast were few in those days, but at least there was the lighthouse on Sambro Island (built from the proceeds of a public lottery); and, in foggy weather, when it was clear inside, a gun was fired from it at intervals, to encourage the groping ships to stand on.

Mr. George C. Chalmer, acting lieutenant, who was officer of the watch, testified that between ten minutes past six and a quarter-past eight five guns were fired from the *Atalante*, but they were not answered. The first gun he heard was at a quarter to nine; but he was in the cabin at the time, and could not tell in what direction the sound bore. After nine o'clock no more guns were heard, and the officers inferred they were far enough to the eastward to turn the corner safely. The reefs in the topsails were shaken out, the royals were hoisted, and the course was shaped N.N.E. for the harbour mouth. Unfortunately the guns heard on board the *Atalante* were not from the light, but from a sister in difficulties, namely, H.M.S. *Barrossa*, also feeling her way through the fog. The miscalculation was natural, but it was also fatal. "The little more and how much it is!" Had the *Atalante* stood on for another quarter of an hour before altering her course, she would have reached port.

Captain Hickey knew of his danger. He and the master, Mr. Pulling, agreed that, though they were near the dreaded "Sisters," the easternmost point of the perilous network of shoals and ledges encircling Sambro, the lead would warn them in time to steer clear. The captain had just hailed the leadsman and asked if he had got ground. He had not, with twenty fathoms "up and down." Before he made his next cast, getting only quarter less four, Holdock on the jib-boom end heard breakers, though he could not see them for the fog, and sang out, "Starboard the helm!" Before the helm could be put hard over, the ship struck. After all her cruises, fights and narrow escapes, the *Atalante* had been navigated, coned and

steered accurately into the breakers roaring over the Blind Sister.

The disaster was sudden, appalling, and complete. The only thing comparable to it ashore is a shock of earthquake. There is the terrific noise, the upheaving, rending jar, and the instantaneous alteration from wonted order to deadly disorder in the whole familiar environment. In the twinkling of an eye, confident security gives place to the near view of danger, pain and death. Such a change is a trier of men's souls.

The first smash must have torn the whole bottom out of the ship. She carried a hundred and twenty tons dead weight of iron ballast, which aided in her destruction. The rudder, half the stern-post, and a great part of her false keel were ripped off on the rocks and floated up alongside. Her "way" carried her on into more deadly breakers, roaring and swilling on the "Sisters." Captain Basil Hall's theory is that immediately on striking the *Atalante* filled to the upper deck, and was only buoyed up for a few minutes by the empty casks in her hold. She broke up at once, parting in two places just before the mizzen and the main chains. This means that the entire after part of the vessel crumbled into the waves. Only the forward part remained above water, and that for perhaps ten minutes.

When a ship grounds, the first concern of the captain is to get her off.

The game is more than the player of the game  
And the ship is more than the crew.

There is a routine to be followed, which appeals even to the landsman—check the ship's progress into greater peril, ascertain the damage done, lighten, and if



possible, save her. When the ship is plainly a total loss, it is time to think about the crew.

On the shattered *Atalante* the routine was followed. Orders were shouted to lower the jib and topsails, but before they could be obeyed, she struck. The carpenter was sent to sound the well and reported that the pump was full—in other words, that the sea had rushed in and flooded the whole interior of the ship. To lighten her, the guns were ordered to be thrown overboard, but before one of them could be cast loose or a rope cut, the *Atalante* had heeled over at such an angle that the men could not stand on the deck. She was on her beam ends, canted outwards to starboard, and most of her guns were under water. Such as could be reached were fired as signals of distress, but no aid came out of the enshrouding mist.

Captain Hickey, the directing intelligence, on whom everything depended, must have made swift decisions. Everything happened at once. Plainly the ship was lost. His mind turned on saving the lives of his valuable crew. The order was given to take to the boats. The *Atalante* carried four; namely, the jolly-boat at the stern, the cutter and the gig on the quarter, and the huge pinnace nesting on the booms amidships. At the first terrifying crash, Mr. Jeremiah O'Sullivan, lately British Vice-Consul at New London, who was being taken as a passenger to Halifax, realised what had happened and rushed instinctively on deck. With two others he helped to lower the cutter, which hung over the quarter-gallery. He also helped to rescue Surgeon Hogan, another Irishman, and he was a sympathetic and admiring eye-witness of the entire scene. At the time of the accident the jolly-boat was on the poop,



being repaired. In launching, she struck a davit and sank; but the gig and the cutter got away safely, in charge of the officers, and stood by, waiting further orders, beyond the dash of the breakers.

Some sixty men still remained on what was left of the little *Atalante*. Their hope of life was the pinnacle, but the first attempt to launch her failed. Such a heavy boat was not moved by means of davits, but by means of tackles, which were hooked to the yard-arms. Hickey ordered the men aloft with the trailing ropes and blocks; but the masts, deprived of their hold-fasts in the kelson, were tottering so dangerously that he ordered them down again. The masts might, in fact, come crashing down upon their heads at any moment. He ordered them to be cut away, and the carpenter and riggers did the job well. The two masts with their load of spars and sails all set fell to starboard, without injuring the remainder of the crew, or their ark of safety, the pinnacle. Only the larboard bulwarks were now above water, and to these the men clung. When the masts crashed overboard, these incredible sailors cheered.

The landsman must remember that all these complicated manœuvres take place at once to shouted orders, amid the uproar of dashing water and rending timbers, within a quarter of an hour. He is to fancy a hundred and thirty bare-footed, bare-headed, half-naked men scampering hither and yon, in, and on, and over the wave-swept, disintegrating wreck, with the agility of apes, performing their various tasks with the deft precision of long practice and moving at the instance of one unruffled, commanding will. That human organisation called the crew remains intact,

functioning perfectly, while their house and home, the ship, is swiftly transformed from minute to minute, and melts, crumbles under their feet.

But the pinnace is not launched. The usual method of hoisting her out was no longer possible, and the sixty men had crowded into her as she remained immovable upon the booms. Seeing it was hopeless to think of launching the pinnace in this state, the captain "persuaded" about half of them to get out and try to launch the boat by main strength. It would be necessary to slew her round, head to the waves, and shove her into them. By dint of incredible exertions, and the aid of a timely billow, the marvellous feat was accomplished. But the billow which lifted the pinnace, also capsized her, spilling the men into the icy water amid a raffle of wreckage and floating spars. By some miracle they contrived to right her, recover their oars, bale her out, and all get into her again. Not a life was lost. She also stood by under the charge of an officer, within hail, a dim wavering form in the mist beyond the turmoil of the breakers.

About forty men were still left with Captain Hickey on the wreck. Their hope of life lay in lashing the booms together into some sort of a raft, for the boats, apparently, were loaded as full as they could hold. But the heavy waves sweeping over them made their task impossible. The last timbers of the *Atalante* were disappearing. No time was to be lost. Captain Hickey decided to pack the remaining men into the already crowded boats.

The cutter and the gig put their surplus passengers into the pinnace, where they were ordered to lie down under the thwarts. They were "packed like herring

in a barrel." Then the two lighter boats returned to the wreck, as near as they dared, to take off their shipmates. It must have been ticklish work. Coming close alongside must have been impossible. Many of the sailors had to swim for it. Others were dragged through the waves by ropes. Some were "forked off by oars and small spars." O'Sullivan's Irish heart was moved by the spectacle. He writes to his father, "To see so many poor souls struggling for life, some naked, others on spars, casks or anything tenable, was a scene painful beyond description."

Other details supplied by Captain Basil Hall show the extraordinary spirit of the British sailor and his unconquerable sense of fun. Even in irretrievable disaster he found something to laugh at.

In dragging the men off the wreck, the jolly negro fiddler of the ship was discovered in the main-chains "with his beloved violin squeezed tightly but delicately under his arm, an absurd picture of distress." He had to choose between his fiddle and his life, and finally he let the fiddle go. The men who rescued him laughed at his predicament.

Another incident presided over by the spirit of mirth is bound up with "zeal," as they called it in Nelson's day, attention to duty and self-forgetfulness. The captain's clerk, a mere "idler," had general orders that, whenever the guns were fired, or anything occurred which might jar the chronometer and so derange its delicate mechanism, he was to hold it in his hand. When the ship struck, with the "shock" which told O'Sullivan her "fate," this unnamed writer also "flew on deck" with the precious chronometer in his hand. He raced up the mizzen rigging, as the nearest, into



the mizzen-top, showing his alarm in his face, and "grinning like a monkey that has run off with a coconut." That also amused the men. Soon the mast gave way and plunged him and his precious timepiece into the sea. "Every eye was now turned to the spot to see whether this most public-spirited of scribes was ever to appear again, when to the great joy of all, he emerged from the waves watch still in hand! but it was not without difficulty that he was dragged into the boat half-drowned." His name is not given by Captain Hall, but surely it deserved to be recorded and remembered.

Thus, one way or another, every man remaining on the wreck was got into the boats. The captain, of course, was the last, and went naturally in the gig. At the court-martial, John Calder, captain of the fore-castle, testified that his costume consisted of his shirt, drawers, and cocked hat! Presumably the admiral's dispatches were inside his shirt, or tied round his waist, for, with the chronometer, they were the only things saved from the wreck. Evidently Captain Hickey had to swim for it, and evidently Calder, the trusty captain of the fore-castle, stood by his officer to the last.

Another trait of the British sailor of those days was his propensity to cheer at the slightest excuse. When the masts were cut away, the crew of the *Atalante* drowned the noise of their fall with their huzzas. And now, as the breakers tore asunder and overwhelmed the last planks of their ship, which had been their home so long, they gave three hearty cheers in farewell. Sails and wooden walls have given place to steam and Harveyised steel, but the sailor-man is not changed at all. At Jutland, "when the *Invincible* went down,"



writes an eye-witness, "four of the chaps managed to collar hold of a raft. As we steamed into action we saw these men on the raft, and at first thought they must be Huns. But as we passed by—for of course we could not stop for anything—the four got up on their feet and cheered us like blazes. It was the finest thing I have ever seen."

The troubles of the "Atalantes" were by no means over. In the pinnace there were seventy-nine men and one woman, in the cutter, forty-two, and in the gig, eighteen. In other words, the three boats were carrying the load of four, their gunwales were almost awash, but a few inches from the lapping waves. They had the greatest difficulty in keeping afloat. Nor had they an exact idea of their position, for the fog was as dense as ever. In order to keep touch, the three boats were ranged in line ahead, and the rearmost boat rowed in front of the foremost, while the other two lay on their oars. Then the second boat, now at the end of the line, rowed to the head; and so on. But such progress was necessarily slow; and they lost their sense of direction. Relief came from an unexpected source. Quarter-master Samuel Shanks is described as an "old, steady, hard-a-weather sailor"; he was the only man saved with a complete suit of clothing. All through he was as cool and unexcited as if a shipwreck were part of the daily routine. He only removed his hat to join in the cheers of farewell to the ship. Now he bethought himself of the small compass-seal which hung at the end of his watch-chain. His discovery was hailed with a shout of joy; the compass was passed to the captain in the gig, and placed on the chronometer so nobly rescued by the clerk. The chronometer was provided

with gimbals, a contrivance of rings and pivots which kept it level with the horizon. On it the compass would be steady. By its aid they were able to shape a course and were heading directly inshore, when they encountered an old fisherman in the fog, who guided them into Portuguese Cove, and safety.

It was two in the afternoon. The shipwrecked mariners were most kindly treated by the poor people of the Cove, and given clothing and food. Huge fires were lighted that they might dry and warm themselves.

Captain Hickey now divided his crew. Those who were worst clad and who had endured the greatest hardships he took with him in the boats. The remainder in three divisions, under their officers, marched overland to Halifax. In spite of the rough roadless country to traverse, and the fact that many of them were shoeless, there was not a single straggler; and that evening the whole ship's company, men and boys, were united in perfect order at the Dock Yard. Not one had lost the number of his mess.

That same evening Captain Hickey wrote a brief note to Sir John Borlase Warren, Admiral of the Blue, apprising him that he had lost his ship, but not one life.

Thursday the 11th must have been a busy day for him. Not only must he have spent much time getting some sort of uniform together (from brother officers, no doubt), for a man cannot be court-martialled in his shirt and drawers, but he must have conferred with Shirreff of the *Barrossa* frigate, and have taken several hours composing the two documents which he read at his trial.

At nine o'clock on the Friday morning, the court-martial was assembled in the cabin of the *Victorious*,

seventy-four, in Halifax harbour. Admiral Griffith presided. The court was composed of ten post captains, among whom were Sir John Poo Beresford of the *Poictiers*, Talbot of the *Victorious*, Capel who commanded the *Phœbe* frigate at Trafalgar, and Gordon of the *Chesapeake*, the most famous frigate in the world bar one, the little *Shannon*, which had taken her in a fifteen-minutes' action off Boston light on the first of June. It was a distinguished tribunal.

After the usual oaths had been taken, Captain Hickey asked leave to read the "narrative" he had prepared of the events already related. Then followed the examination of the various witnesses regarding the navigation, course, direction of wind, precautions taken, and so on. Questions were put to the man on trial, but he had not a fault to find with any officer or man of the crew. Whatever blame might befall, he alone was responsible. When all the testimony had been heard, he questioned his brother officers, Beresford, Pechell and Gordon, as to whether or not they had navigated the vessels under their command into Halifax harbour in thick weather. They had accomplished the feat. Then he read another clear, brief, manly statement, which he had prepared, summing the evidence as making for acquittal. He concludes with a figure drawn from the theatre: "I feel assured that though I have had a most important part to perform in a most tragdic (*sic*) scene, my Cause is safe and that I incur no risk of being hissed off the stage." He was not. The finding was "Acquitted from blame." In the Navy, then as now, there are no excuses; but the loss of his ship could not have been held against him, for he was promoted to post rank the same year, and served in the Great Lakes of Canada.



Two independent judgments will enable the reader to estimate truly the nature of Hickey's conduct in extremity. O'Sullivan wrote: "His calmness, his humanity and his courage during the entire of this awful scene was superior to man." That is the view of the landsman, the passenger, the eye-witness. This is the mature opinion of a naval officer, the gild brother, the professional sailor, Captain Basil Hall:

"It is rather an unusual combination of disasters for a ship to be so totally wrecked as to be actually obliterated from the face of the waters in the course of an hour, in fine weather, in the daytime, on well-known rocks, and close to a lighthouse, but without the loss of a single man, or the smallest accident to anyone on board.

"In the next place, it is highly important to observe that the lives of the crew would not, and perhaps could not, have been saved, had the discipline been in the smallest degree less exactly maintained. Had any impatience been manifested by the people to run into the boats, or had the captain not possessed sufficient authority to reduce the numbers which had crowded into the pinnace when she was still resting on the booms, at least half of the crew must have lost their lives.

"It was chiefly, therefore, if not entirely, to the personal influence which Captain Hickey possessed over the minds of all on board, that their safety was owing. Their habitual confidence in his fortitude, talents, and professional knowledge had from long experience become so great, that every man in the ship, in this extremity of danger, instinctively turned to him for assistance; and seeing him so cheerful, and so completely master of himself, they relinquished to his well-known and often-



tried sagacity the formidable task of extricating them from the impending peril. It is at such moments as these, indeed, that the grand distinction between man and man is developed, and the full ascendancy of a powerful and well-regulated mind makes itself felt."





NOVA SCOTIA has need of another Hakluyt to record the traffics and discoveries, the disasters and the heroic deeds of the seafaring provincials. For more than a century Nova Scotian keels ploughed the seven seas in peace and war. Five thousand vessels, Howe boasted, had been built in the province; and they carried the flag to every port in the world. Once Nova Scotia had even a tiny navy of her own. Privateering in three wars, mutinies, encounters with pirates, dreary wrecks, incredible endurance, rescues from death and destruction, crowd the record with moving incident. Many are the tragedies of the sea. What the ordinary perils of navigation may mean, what suffering seafaring folk may be called to undergo, with what hearts they met their trials will be plain from this simple tale of a little Nova Scotian coasting vessel. Because of the vessel's irregular course, the tale has been entitled "Via London," but perhaps a better name would be "Angeline's Wedding Dress."

At seven o'clock on the morning of 11th December, 1868, in the dim dawning of a winter's day, the schooner *Industry*, thirty-seven tons register, put out from the wharf behind Ronald Currie's store on the west bank of the beautiful La Have river. Below hatches she had stowed a cargo of dry and pickled fish, and on deck she carried a load of cord-wood for the Halifax market. Lewis Spongle was captain; with Currie he was joint owner of vessel and lading. Three hands were sufficient

for the needs of the small schooner: their names were Henry Legag, Henry Wolfe and Daniel Wambach. Besides, she carried two passengers, Lawrence Murphy of Lawrencetown, and a young girl belonging to La Have called Angeline Publicover, eighteen years of age, who was going to Halifax to buy her wedding dress. Her picture shows her to have been small and slight in figure, and fair in the face, with candid brown eyes, brown abundant hair, rosy cheeks, and kind smiling lips. It is a fine face. She would have made a comely bride. She could have had no forewarning of the many trials she was so soon called on to endure; nor could she have dreamed that she would prove a heroine in a dreadful extremity.

The day was cold with light westerly winds, which drove the *Industry* towards her port of destination, only fifty-four miles away. Perhaps no one remembered that Friday is not counted a lucky day for beginning a voyage. It was certainly ominous for the *Industry* and all on board. Using the earliest hours of daylight, she pushed out past Ironbound straight along the chord of the great double fold in the coastline made by Mahone and St. Margaret's Bays. In spite of the favourable wind, it was not a good sailing day. The westerly breeze was fickle, and the mild weather was merely the lull before the coming storm. It took the little schooner nearly seventeen hours to cover some forty miles, which means that she must have dawdled because the wind failed her. The short winter day passed; the black December night came on; the weather changed, and, with it, the fortunes of all on board the *Industry*.

About one o'clock in the morning of Saturday the 12th, they could see the light on Sambro Island, which



for a century and more has been the beacon for all vessels approaching Halifax from the westward or the south. The light bore north north-east. The deceitful west wind which had so far favoured them now died away, and suddenly, with the very slightest warning, the storm swooped down upon them from the north-east, bringing the blinding snow with it and hiding the dim loomings of the land. Halifax harbour is beset with dangers. It is a wicked coast to beat up to in a black winter storm. Progress towards the port was impossible, so the helm was put over, and the *Industry* turned in her tracks to run for La Have. She went back faster than she came.

The veering of the wind must have been terribly sudden. Apparently the schooner was taken aback, for the first blast of the snowstorm split the foresail and made it useless. Henceforth the *Industry* was like a bird with one broken wing. This was only the first of the mishaps which befell the ill-starred vessel that dark night. At the same time the can of kerosene was spilled; the cabin lamp was never lit again; and it was no slight aggravation of their misery that more than half of every twenty-four hours must be spent in utter darkness.

In the double darkness of night and the thick driving snow, the *Industry* fled back to La Have before the north-east gale. It was still thick weather when Captain Sponagle judged that he was near Cross Island, the sea-mark sentinel before Lunenburg harbour, to which Lunenburg sailormen find their way back from the ends of the four oceans. The mouth of the La Have is just around the corner. Now the *Industry* was near home and safety, but once more her luck changed for the worse.

The fierce gale suddenly chopped round to the north-west, driving the schooner back from her desired haven and out into the furious Atlantic. If her foresail had been intact, she might have been hove to, and so have ridden out the gale. In attempting to do so, the damaged sail was blown to rags. There was nothing for it but to douse all sail and run before the storm. For three days and three nights the *Industry* scudded under bare poles straight out to sea. To take the dangerous weight off her, the deck-load of cord-wood was started overboard. In the darkness and confusion all available hands must have been working desperately to clear the deck. They were fighting for their lives, and in their haste another accident occurred. One of the two water-casks secured just forward of the main-mast went overboard with the cord-wood, and the other was so badly smashed that only two gallons of water was saved from it. This loss meant later intense suffering from thirst. The two gallons from the broken cask, and a kettleful of melted hail-stones gathered in a remnant of the foresail, was the whole water supply of seven persons for eighteen days. They were rationed to a wineglass apiece once in twenty-four hours. The last drop was finished on 27th December. Along with the deck-load went their only boat.

Never counting on more than the day's run to Halifax, the owners had not provisioned their little craft for such an unforeseen emergency as being blown out to sea. Food there was practically none. What little they had was spoiled by the salt water. For two weeks, from the 15th to the 29th of December, those seven persons sustained life on ten hard-tack. A tiny fragment of biscuit once in the twenty-four hours was the ration.

On that and the thimbleful of water, they kept the life in their bodies for an endless fortnight. They dared not touch the salt fish in the hold, for fear of the thirst that would drive them mad. With fresh water they might have been able to cook the fish, though the stove was damaged in the hurly-burly of the first night. They found a few oats in a bag, and these they managed to parch on the top of the broken stove and eat. On Christmas Day they discovered one potato in the bilge. They divided it into seven portions, just and loyal in their misery.

“Our tongues were so swollen we could scarcely eat it.”

On Tuesday the 15th they were able to do something besides hold on for dear life, as their frail little fabric raced the mountainous seas. In the turmoil of waters they saw another sail, an American fishing schooner, which ran down close enough to speak with the helpless *Industry*. The weather was too wild for the Americans to launch a boat with food and water, or to render any assistance whatever. For a few moments the two craft were near enough for Captain Sponagle to shout that he wanted his position and his course for Bermuda, and for the American skipper to shout back the necessary directions; then each went his way. Once more the crew got some canvas on the *Industry*, the jib and mainsail, both close-reefed no doubt, and, starving and parched with thirst, they held on for the Summer Islands. The gale was favourable; but they were not destined to reach the port they were headed for any more than Halifax. Tuesday was evidently their first breathing space. On this day Captain Sponagle took stock, collected his ten biscuits, and

began rationing them out, as well as the precious two gallons of water. For three days the *Industry* held her course towards Bermuda, but the faint gleam of good fortune, the hope of reaching port, proved to be illusory.

Once more the cruel wind chopped round to the westward and blew a terrific gale. Evidently the little schooner was buffeted by a series of cyclonic storms. December 1868 was a particularly bad month all over the North Atlantic. Many were the wrecks and reports of disaster. Like the former, this gale lasted three days, "during which," says the original narrative, "we suffered severely." The severity of their sufferings is easy to realise. This last gale was the worst of all, and it grew wilder and wilder. The huge confused billows made a clean breach over the labouring schooner, tearing away her bulwarks, rails and stanchions, and flooding the tiny cabin. The force of the waves also wrenched the tarpaulin off the forward hatch and carried it away. To prevent the hold from being flooded and the vessel foundering there and then, the resourceful crew nailed over the hatch a cow-hide intended for the Halifax market; and it kept the water out. But with the prolonged and furious buffetings of wind and sea, the frame of the *Industry* was being racked apart, the seams opened, and she began to leak badly. To the sufferings from cold, hunger, thirst, was added the exhausting, endless labour of pumping to keep afloat.

"Our strength was fast failing, but we managed by dint of great exertion to pump the vessel."

To strain every muscle of arms and back at working a machine which hardly forces the water out as fast as



it runs in and to know that your life depends upon your perseverance, is the toil of Sisyphus. If the water rose in the hold beyond a certain point, the vessel's reserve buoyancy would be gone, and, under the next swamping billow, she would go down like a stone. So these men laboured, hour after hour, day and night, on the reeling, wave-swept deck, toiling like slaves, with a few crumbs of biscuit, and a wine-glass of water to sustain their strength.

Christmas Day, with its happy memories, brought increase of misery to all on board the *Industry*. Their Christmas dinner was the solitary raw potato divided into seven portions, which they could scarcely eat. Christmas night was remembered for its terrors; it was a night of despair. Work at the pump was abandoned as useless. There was no one at the tiller; hope was gone. All seven were huddled together in the inky darkness of the little cabin. Overhead tons of water crashed upon the roof as the unguided *Industry* pitched and rolled and wallowed in the giant billows. There was nothing to do but hold on and wait for the inevitable end. The schooner might go down at any moment.

What was done in that cabin is best told in the words of a survivor:

“We were nearly exhausted with hunger and exposure and our thirst was dreadful, and expecting every moment to be our last we united in prayer to the Almighty and shook hands with each other, as we thought, for the last time. Most of the men gave way to tears, but our only female passenger cheered us with the hope that our prayers were answered, and we were strengthened again to pump the ship.”

“Extremity is the trier of spirits,” says Shakespeare. “Hope,” says Chesterton wisely, “is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate. . . . The virtue of hope exists only in earthquake and eclipse. . . . For practical purposes it is at the hopeless moment that we require the hopeful man. . . . Exactly at the instant when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful.”

These words fit the situation to a nicety. It is no wonder that men, weakened by a fortnight of exposure, starvation, thirst and exhausting labour, should shed hysterical tears; nor is it their shame. But the spirit of the “female passenger” did not break or bend. In the black darkness of that little cabin, the courage and hope of a mere girl shone like a star. Angeline Publicover cheered the despairing men by her faith in the mercy of God, and they were “strengthened” to resume their Sisyphean labours. On board the *Industry* the last morsel of food was eaten, the last drop of water drunk, when rescue came. All these weary days driving hither and thither in mid-Atlantic, another vessel was sailing to cross her track. The predestined meeting came to pass on 29th December.

The Coalfleets of Hantsport were a typical family of Nova Scotia mariners. Once a nameless baby drifted ashore from the wreckage of a collier on the coast. The boy lived, and from these circumstances was given the name Coalfleet, meet origin for a seafaring clan. From him was descended Hiram Coalfleet, one of six brothers, all of whom followed the sea. He was a master mariner, honourable, looked up to, and a skilful navigator. In command of the Nova Scotia barque *Providence* of four hundred and eighty tons, he was now on his way from

Philadelphia to London with a cargo of kerosene. His brother Abel sailed with him as chief mate.

His vessel got her name in a curious way. She was built in the beautiful little town of Canning by the well-known firm of Bigelow. When she stood almost complete on the ways with a little schooner beside her, the master builder decided that as the timbers were ready, the schooner should be launched that day. So it was done, and she floated safely into the narrow tidal river Pereau. That very afternoon a fire broke out which swept the whole village, but it stopped short at the barque's hull; the flames scorched her sides. If the schooner had remained on the ways, both vessels must have been burned. Hence the schooner was christened *Escape*, and the barque *Providence*. Now the *Providence* was to earn her name a second time.

Seven hundred miles east of Nova Scotia, she sighted a vessel, as the expressive language of the sea puts it, "in distress." That so small a craft should be so far from land implied accident, and the wave-swept deck and the jagged fragments of bulwarks would tell their own tale. The *Providence* bore down on the schooner under storm canvas, lay to, and tried to launch her long-boat. It was still blowing a gale with a heavy sea running, and getting the big heavy boat over the side into the sea was no easy task. After several attempts, it was smashed and lost. The only other boat on board was too small to live in such a sea. But Captain Coal-fleet was not at the end of his resources. He tried another means of rescue which put his own ship in peril, which called for most skilful handling of her, and which would fail but for cool, swift, decisive action. He manœuvred his big barque to windward of the little

coaster, backed his topsail, and drifted down on the *Industry* broadside on. He must have calculated his distance to a nicety, and he must have had a well-disciplined crew; no lubbers or wharf-rats stood by the sheets and braces that December day. He was risking his own ship with all on board, for collision was inevitable; his part was to minimise the shock of contact. As the two vessels swung crashing together, the main-yard of the *Providence* fouled the rigging of the *Industry*. Nimble as a cat, Abel Coalfleet ran up on the main-yard, lay out along it, and, with a line in his hand, probably the clue-garnet, let himself down swiftly on the tossing deck of the schooner. Any passenger on an ocean steamer who has ever watched the antics of the pilot's boat alongside in comparatively smooth water, can form some conception of the way two vessels rolling, tossing, pitching, grinding together would behave in a mid-winter Atlantic storm. Abel Coalfleet, balancing on the yard-arm, which pointed in the sky one moment, and, the next, almost dipped in the waves, makes the acrobatics of the circus and moving pictures look silly. He must have been as cool-headed as he was brave and strong and nimble. He might have lost his hold and been flung into the sea, or entangled in the cordage, or crushed between the grinding hulls. As he dropped to the reeling, wave-swept schooner's deck, he fastened a line to the one woman on board, who was speedily hauled up the side of the *Providence*. The six men were also swiftly pulled on board by means of ropes the crew flung to them, with Abel Coalfleet always aiding. Then he slashed the stay which held the yard-arm of the *Providence* fettered, and swarmed up the barque's side like the people he had saved; the backed



topsail swung round promptly, and the *Providence*, having sustained "much damage," was once more put on her course for London. The rescue could only have taken a few minutes; it was effected "most expeditiously" say the rescued, in a smart and seamanlike manner. The collision gave the *coup de grâce* to the battered little coaster. Three-quarters of an hour later, she disappeared beneath the stormy Atlantic with her cargo of dry and pickled fish, her broken stove, and the cow-skin on the fore-hatch. The *Providence* had come up just in time.

Of course, saving life at sea is more or less a habit with sailors, all in the day's work, and nothing to call for remark. A dry, matter-of-fact entry in the log of the *Providence* would close the incident. But this rescue was exceptionally hazardous and brilliant. The skill of Captain Hiram in handling his big ship was equalled by the way Abel seconded him. Sponagle, with a sailor's appreciation, records that he "gallantly hazarded his life to save ours." Gallant is the word.

The rescued seven considered their preservation while in the *Industry* "perfectly miraculous, and the manner in which we were relieved almost as wonderful." But they were in the last stages of exhaustion, with bodies wasted by nearly three weeks of starvation, and with tongues so swollen that they could hardly speak. All on board were most kind to the castaways, but they still had many hardships to undergo. Their proper place was a hospital ward with careful nursing and nutritious food until their sorely-tried bodies recovered their tone. But the resources of a Nova Scotia barque in the sixties were limited; she would carry only coarse food to meet the bare necessities. Moreover the taste of

kerosene had got into the food and water, and produced painful sickness. It was not until three weeks after their rescue, on 20th January, 1869, that they reached London, weak, utterly destitute, but thankful to God for His mercy that they were alive.

From London they were forwarded to Liverpool by kind friends, whence they returned to Halifax by the Inman Line steamer *Etna*. Angeline Publicover was particularly well treated by the ladies on board, who dressed her "like a queen." So at length they reached the port they set out for on 12th February in a varied and circuitous passage of sixty-one days. The newly organised Dominion of Canada paid the travelling expenses of these shipwrecked Nova Scotians. The Halifax papers showed no interest in the event; they did not interview the castaways, print their "story" or their pictures. Such adventures and exploits were too common. The shipping news occupied but small space in the local journals and is to be found under the heading "Reports, Disasters, etc." The "etc." is eloquent. In the sixties was the heyday of Nova Scotia shipping. The great industry of the province was reaching its peak of prosperity. So six or seven lines, not quite accurate, of unemotional minion type told this tale of heroism in the "Reports, Disasters, etc." column, and that was the end of it. At home, the rescued men were welcomed as if risen from the dead.

The conduct of the Coalfleets was brought to the notice of the governor-general, and in due time Hiram was presented with a gold watch and Abel with a pair of binoculars suitably inscribed. The watch must have been lost, with other possessions, when the ironically christened *Happy Home* was wrecked on the Trinity

ledges, 3rd January, 1881. When she fell over and sank, all hands got into the mizzen rigging. His wife and nine-year-old daughter Mary died beside Captain Coalfleet that winter night, and his legs were frozen to the knees.

Of the forgotten heroine of the *Industry*, Angeline Publicover, it is recorded that she never bought her wedding dress. In *Aes Triplex* Stevenson asks, "What woman could be lured into marriage, so much more dangerous than the wildest sea?" Angeline had had her experience of the wildest sea. She was a good girl and a brave girl. Long-drawn suffering and deadly peril only revealed the native strength of a character which must be called heroic.







## I

### PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

THE deep-sea captains of Nova Scotia took their wives with them on their long voyages; and these stout-hearted women shared with their husbands the perils of great waters. The ship was their floating home: the big comfortable cabin, the nursery. Nova Scotia children had memories of sliding down the tilted cabin floor in a storm, of "northers" in Valparaiso, of watching a vast expanse of sail against the sky as they lay on the cabin top in halcyon weather.

No stancher vessels ever floated than those built in Nova Scotia shipyards of Bay of Fundy spruce. Their keels furrowed every sea. The master mariners of the province were a race apart, intrepid, skilled, resourceful, strong in character, strict in discipline, kings of the quarter-deck. They met every chance of the treacherous sea with unshaken hearts. They might be dismasted in the Indian Ocean, or crushed in Arctic ice-floes. Yellow fever might carry off their crews in Rio, or their cargo might catch fire off the Horn. One and all they proved equal to every emergency. Wrecks and disasters only threw into relief the heroism of captain and crew. They lived to tell the tale. But the common form of epitaph for many an able ship was "Never again heard of."

When the full-rigged ship *Milton* of fourteen hundred

tons register was launched from the yard of Brown and Anthony of Maitland, Nova Scotia, in 1879, the captain's wife, Kate MacArthur, was on board, and for two years and a half she lived in the vessel that was her home, except for one week which she spent ashore at Copenhagen. She was no ordinary woman. Strong in body and mind, fair of face, educated, musical, observant, keen-witted, "the best of company," she was a devoted wife and mother. She took her religion to sea with her, along with her Bible and her Prayer Book. Her favourite psalm was the magnificent ninety-first with its consoling assurances of God's protection. A sea-captain's daughter, it was in the order of nature that she should marry a sea-captain at eighteen and spend her honeymoon at sea. The salt was in her blood. Her first voyage was to New Orleans, where their ship was burnt at the wharf edge.

The man of her choice was Henry MacArthur, like her born and brought up in Maitland. He was rather under middle size, powerfully built, with a cast in the right eye. His friends recognised his strength of character, and his life proved the truth of their estimate. Once in the North Atlantic his vessel became water-logged, and he had to take to the rigging. He suffered many things before he was rescued, but he was saved to endure greater hardships in another ocean.

On the 9th of August, 1881, the *Milton* sailed from Shields with a cargo of coal for San Francisco. There were twenty-three souls on board. Captain MacArthur had his wife with him and his two little boys, Archie, a fair-haired child of four, and Frankie, a mere baby of two. Charles Carroll of Windsor, N.S., was the first mate, and Edwin S. Anthony of Maitland, second. He

was eighteen years of age and had spent five at sea. There were seventeen hands before the mast, for the *Milton* was one of the biggest and finest ships ever built in Nova Scotia. The voyage through the Atlantic, round the Horn, and into the Pacific was as pleasant as any in Kate MacArthur's experience. With good weather and favourable winds it stretched out into months, an endless succession of peaceful days. Day by day the magnificent big ship ploughed her stately way across the vast, empty sea. She was a new, staunch and well-found vessel, with a consummate sailor in command, and she had completed three-fourths of her course; but Fate had prepared a tragic ending for the pleasant voyage. The seaman's is the most perilous of callings. Death is always in ambush, waiting to spring upon him.

## II

### TAKING TO THE BOATS

All went well until the 22nd of December. The *Milton* was just north of the Equator: to be precise, in Lat. 3° N., Long. 110° W. Dinner was over in the cabin, when Carroll, the first mate, hurried in with the dread news that the cargo of coal was on fire. Someone had noticed smoke coming up the main hatch. Even in a dump exposed to the air, coal generates heat and gas. Packed in a ship's hold it is a dangerous cargo. The first warning of danger may be flames bursting through a bulkhead, or an explosion which tears the

hatches off the deck. There is no greater terror than fire at sea.

At the time Captain MacArthur was in bed, crippled with rheumatism, "hardly able to move a finger." His wife had to help him to dress; but he was soon on deck. He got the force pumps working and organised a bucket brigade. All that afternoon and far into the night the crew of the *Milton* fought the fire, but in vain. The hold was a burning furnace under their feet. They did all that men could do, but they could not save the stately *Milton*; and at four bells MacArthur gave the order to hoist out the boats. At three o'clock in the morning of 23rd December they were forced to leave her. "We all got away ship-shape and Bristol fashion."

The three boats were lowered and supplied with everything needed for a long voyage—bedding, water, tinned provisions. The weather was calm; there was time to get all necessary stores together. MacArthur was "practical," as a fellow-captain put it. He thought of everything. He took with him the ship's register, that indispensable document without which a captain never goes ashore, his chart of the North Pacific (which Mrs. MacArthur carried in her bosom), his sextant, the ship's compass and the patent log. He kept a record of the long voyage about to begin, a document still in his son Archie's possession. He even took with him his red ensign, and it served a "practical" purpose in the end.

The captain's boat was twenty-four feet long, seven and a half feet in beam, and three and a half feet deep—the dimensions of a small yacht. She was fitted with two masts carrying sprit-sails and a jib. Into this roomy boat went all necessary gear and provisions



of canned goods and hard biscuit for twenty-five days, including the chest of linen bought in Belfast by the captain's wife. Mrs. MacArthur and the two little boys followed. She had no fear, or even nervousness, at the prospect of the perilous adventure on which she was embarking, though she was soon to bear another child. The carpenter, Johansen, two foremast hands, Anderson and Annesitt, and the boatswain, George Ettinger, a Nova Scotia boy from Kennetcook, went with them.

Into the first mate's boat went seven men, including the cook. She was fitted with two sprit-sails but no jib. The boat of Edwin Anthony, the second mate, was called the captain's gig. It was long and narrow and carried a single sprit-sail. It was used for going ashore and when at anchor in the stream or in harbour. It did not require the same sail as the others to get up the same speed. All three boats were provisioned alike.

They rowed off about a mile to windward of the ship, as MacArthur feared an explosion of gas, and for the rest of the tropic night they watched the *Milton* flaming like a huge torch, and lighting up leagues of ocean. At daylight the flames burst through the deck. They rowed back to the ship, and MacArthur the "practical" tried to increase his stock of provisions. Carroll, the first mate, was ordered on board for this end, but he could not get at the stores for the smoke and heat.

The three boats did not begin their voyage at once. Throughout the whole of 23rd December, and until the next morning, they stood by and watched the flaming ship. By that time the masts and upper deck were gone. The *Milton* was burnt to the water's edge. The woman gives one reason for this strange reluctance to part from the ship they could not save:

“She seemed company to us out there on the Pacific. She was a fine ship and we loved her as our home. It seemed such a pity to see her go to ruin right there before our eyes.”

It was like a true sailor's wife to forget her own desperate plight in regret for the ruined ship. Another reason for waiting was the chance of the fire attracting the attention of a passing vessel. The *Milton* was only a dismantled, smoking, glowing hulk when the three boats started in procession northward for the nearest land, Cape St. Lucas, at the very tip of Lower California. The captain's boat was in the lead, and at night burned the ship's port or red light, showing astern. The second mate's followed the captain's, and showed the starboard or green light over the stern. The first mate's boat came third in the forlorn little flotilla, and the boat ahead had no means of knowing that the next astern was following and keeping station.

The starting-point for their long voyage was not favourable. Their destination was twelve hundred miles due north. Their course lay across the Equatorial Current, which would carry them eastward, and the Counter-Equatorial Current, which would carry them westward. After that, there was a long disheartening beating up against the North-east Trades to follow. The navigation of the smallest vessel with the simplest rig means continual vigilance. Conditions of sea and wind and weather vary from hour to hour. MacArthur had first to determine what course he should sail in order to take advantage of the favourable winds, and lose the minimum of time and distance. This was a problem for the experienced navigator. MacArthur solved it triumphantly.

The presence of his wife and children must have increased his anxieties tenfold. Before the end, he had to suffer the extremes of hunger and thirst, to witness those nearest and dearest endure the same torments, to watch his baby boy die. Before the end, his long vigils and the dazzling brightness of the sun on the tropic seas affected his eyesight, and produced a most painful malady. He found the foreigners were not to be trusted. Before the end, he had to keep up the *morale* of despairing, mutinous, insane men. Still he held on, never bating a jot of heart or hope, even when hope seemed folly. And his iron will won through.

The boats soon parted company. On Christmas Eve, the first mate's boat luffed up alongside Anthony's and Carroll "passed the usual good night and Merry Christmas and dropped astern again. I supposed he was following, but when daylight broke on Christmas morning nothing could be seen of his boat. We cruised about all day, but did not sight the mate's boat again, and since that time she has not been heard of. He was a fine fellow and a good seaman, but in a careless moment must have held her in the trough and filled her or turned her over, as the breeze was fresh and one had to be looking for combers all the time and let her head come to the wind to avoid filling."

The two remaining boats resumed their voyage. The weather was fine. An awning was rigged over the after part of the long-boat, so that Mrs. MacArthur could have some shelter and privacy. Here she slept with her children. Often she would ask the captain to leave the awning aside so that she could lie and watch the tropic stars. At such times she wondered if she should ever see the folk in quiet little Maitland again.



There was no suffering from cold, though all were frequently wet to the skin with the water shipped in rough weather. The heat of the morning sun would draw up a thick white steam from the bedding, and it soon rotted.

On the ninth day there was another parting of company. In Anthony's own words, "I awoke to find I had lost sight of the captain's boat, and by inquiry from the A.B. who steered the last trick, found that he had not passed the captain's boat, but had allowed it to get out of sight dead ahead. So there was nothing to do but crowd on sail and overhaul it if we could, which we did in a few hours, as the captain had missed us and lay-to for us to come up. Well, when I came alongside he hailed me and asked me to come on his boat as he wanted to have a talk with me. I reluctantly went over and the steward stepped in my place. He was a Dane, an experienced seaman and navigator and one who had seen better days; probably he walked the weather side, but was in the lee scuppers when we shipped him. When it came night the captain said, 'You can go on your boat in the morning, but stay with me to-night; my wife and the boys want to talk with you.' So I did, and when day broke there was no second boat in sight." As in the former case, the long-boat cruised about all day looking for her missing consort, and only gave up the search when darkness settled on the water.

On the twenty-third day, the crew of the second mate's boat were picked up by the British ship *Cochin* and taken to San Francisco, bringing the first news of the disaster.

This transfer, which was apparently the result of



chance, worked well. MacArthur had a man of his own race to relieve him at the tiller, one who understood navigation, and who could take his place in case of accident. Foreigners are always doubtful, and in the event of "trouble" they would be two to one. His captain's confidence in the Maitland boy was well justified. Edwin Anthony knew how to obey, and in more than one emergency rendered valuable assistance.

On the morning of 4th January, 1882, MacArthur made a startling discovery. "I found the provisions and water were becoming scarce, and from this day put all hands on short allowance." Behind this unemotional statement is the ugly fact that the hands were pilfering the food and drinking the water in the night. Foreseeing the dangers of thirst, MacArthur took no salt provisions except one ham for each boat. Everything else was in tins. The sailors would purloin a can of tomatoes, for instance, from the stores, pierce it with a nail, drink off the liquid, and replace it. When the time came to open the tin, the contents had rotted. It was a sickening discovery of suicidal treachery. Henceforth the mate and captain had to keep watch and ward over their scanty stock of food and water by day and night.

One seems to see a sunburnt, bearded figure with bloodshot eyes steering his big boat northward, ever northward, with his revolver ready to his hand. Under the rude awning are his wife and children, and forward the cowed and treacherous foreigners.

The Pacific is a vast and empty ocean, traversed at that time by few ships. Not until the morning of 16th January did the castaways of the *Milton* sight a sail. Their position was Lat. 19° 58' N. and Long. 121° 55' W.

The strange vessel was six miles to the north of them, standing to the eastward. The captain's boat was on the opposite tack. MacArthur came about, in order to cross the stranger's track; but there was a rough sea and little wind. To help the boat along he put the men at the oars, and to strengthen and encourage them at their hard task he gave them two gallons of water out of their scanty store. The captain had no doubt at the time that they were seen, and would be picked up, so he could afford to be lavish. He watched the strange sail try to come about, miss stays, and then "wear," or come round in the opposite direction, as if she had seen the boat with the British ensign flying, union down, and was heading directly for it. Hope of rescue was strong in every heart.

Then at the critical moment a squall swept down across the face of the water, blurring sky and sea. The stranger wore round with his head to the north-west, and quickly disappeared from sight.

The castaways stood up and waved signals, and shouted till their voices failed. All was in vain. The hope of rescue vanished beyond the sea-rim.

For the honour of the unknown master of the unknown vessel, MacArthur, with the chivalry of the sea, records his conviction that the stranger did not see the *Milton's* boat; otherwise he would have picked them up.

## III

## THE CONDENSER

It was a cruel disappointment. Weakened by the short allowance of food, worn out with pulling at the oars, the men "lost heart," as their captain records, "and gave up." But MacArthur was the breed that never gives up, or gives in, the kind that fights on with the scabbard when the sword is broken.

On 18th January the last drop of water was gone. The single precious gallon remaining had been husbanded, and doled out justly, cupful by cupful, share and share alike. Then the more dreadful tortures of thirst began.

Hunger is easier to bear than thirst. After the first three or four days of slow starvation, the feeling of hunger passes away. The body falls back on its reserves, and consumes first its fat and then its muscle. It wastes to skin and bone. Weakness comes on, and listlessness increases as strength fails. But thirst is an agony always intensifying and culminating in madness.

Kate MacArthur tells a little of what she endured: "My tongue got thick and stuck out between my cracked lips, and I seemed burning for water. I used to get a little relief by binding my head and throat with cloths dipped in the sea, but still the thirst kept raging worse and worse."

The fable of King Tantalus up to the lips in water he might not drink was a reality in the captain's boat. To drink of the sunlit, sparkling brine was madness. Rain fell all around the horizon from time to time, but no shower blessed the baked lips of the castaways.

Memories of far-off Maitland thronged on the captain's wife to increase her misery.

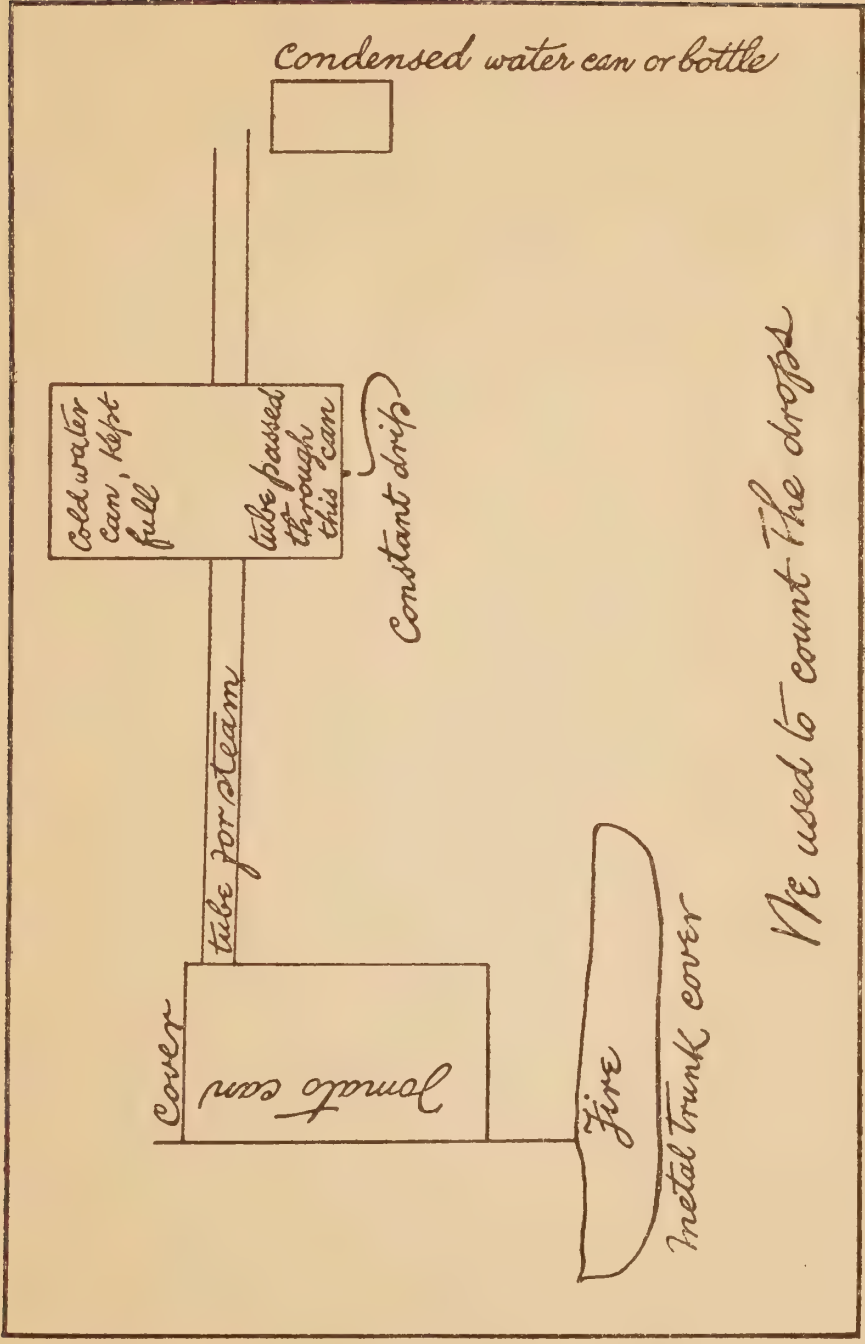
"As I lay in the bottom of the boat with the little sufferers, and heard the swish of the sea against the side, the memory of every drink I had ever enjoyed came back to tantalise me. I don't believe I ever took a drink of cool water, from my childhood up to the moment of leaving the ship, that each circumstance did not come back to my mind distinctly. And to look at all that water around us, so blue, and clear, and cool when we dipped our hands in the sea, it seemed very strange that we should be dying of thirst."

Sleep brought no relief. One dream haunted her—of standing by a well of cold water and putting the cup to her lips. The sailors were insanely drinking sea-water at night; the children were moaning for water. And there was no water.

MacArthur and Anthony between them made a condenser, "after a great deal of trouble." This exploit is, one would say, unique in the annals of shipwreck.

It consisted of three parts: a tomato can with a cover in which the water was boiled, a tube fitted into it and running through a second can of cold water to condense the steam. This rude still was secured to the after-thwart by lashings of marlin. The two problems were the "worm," and fuel for the fire. After forty years Mr. Anthony writes: "That tube I remember well. It was made from a tin can, cut in a long strip, as when you pare an apple round and round without breaking the peel, and spirally constructed, as you would wrap a strip of paper about an inch wide around a pencil, with a half-inch lap, so that half the width of the strip was in the lap. The diameter of the tube was





We used to count The drops

DIAGRAM OF CONDENSER MADE BY CAPTAIN MACARTHUR  
 (Drawn by E. S. Anthony)



about one-quarter or three-eighths of an inch. This tube was fitted to the condenser can and to the cooling can, being wound with cloth and marlin. The joint connecting the tube with the condenser was made tight." The accompanying diagram by Mr. Anthony makes all clear.

But how could the indispensable fire be built and maintained? For fire-place the cover of Mrs. MacArthur's old-fashioned tin or sheet-metal trunk was torn off, and secured under the can for boiling water. For fuel MacArthur literally burnt his boat under him. He whittled up all the oars but two. Then he attacked the planking, the "ribbons," the thwarts, the gunwales. Every particle of wood that could be spared without weakening the structure of the boat was used to feed the fire. Only the central thwart was spared. In this way he managed to obtain from a pint to almost a quart of water in twenty-four hours. Henceforth there is always fine, acrid, hardwood smoke drifting to leeward, as the long-boat is held down on her predestined course. The fire is maintained like the fire of Vesta.

"We used to sit and count the drops, as the condensed water dripped into the tin," said the captain's wife; and the second mate confirms.

A mouthful of water in the twenty-four hours barely held life in the body. All shared alike. The condenser was kept going, the boat was navigated, observations were taken, position fixed and progress recorded in the log by the will of the gaunt, bearded man with bloodshot eyes. The lives of all depended on him. That is the captain's part.

One night there was trouble with one of the hands. Anthony recalls the incident: "I remember distinctly,

one night when I was at the tiller, seeing a Greek worming his way aft on his stomach, evidently bent on securing food or causing trouble. I touched Captain MacArthur with my foot, he being asleep at the time, and he understood immediately. A club we had near for just such an emergency was used immediately, and this Greek was stowed away unconscious in the bow of the boat. We also discovered that he had a very vicious-looking knife. Strange to say, this man was the only one of the sailors to survive."

Then death entered the long-boat. The youngest was the first to go. Said the captain's wife:

"My little boys began to cry for water. My two-year-old baby Frankie lay moaning out of his parched mouth, and died in my lap of hunger and thirst. It was too much . . . too much."

But the mother could not weep for him then. To a friend MacArthur said afterwards, "I would have given my life to give him water." Anthony's narrative states the blood was running from the baby's mouth.

Frankie died on 2nd February, but the mother could not bear to have the wasted little body put over the side and dropped into the sea. Sharks were always dogging the boat. MacArthur sewed up his child's body in canvas and placed it in a tin box, to be taken ashore and given Christian burial.

The food so carefully husbanded and so insanely pilfered came to an end at last. There remained the ham as emergency ration. It was portioned out justly, share and share alike. Everyone in the boat fared the same, captain, child and common sailor. Only shreds of meat were left on the ham-bone.

On 28th January a big flying-fish rose out of the sea



and fell into the boat. It was cooked and eaten, affording each a mouthful. That was the last of the food.

All through this dread voyage the mother denied herself for her children's sake. That is the mother's part. Kate MacArthur merely nibbled at her portion and gave what she could to her wailing babes. For two weeks at the end she hoarded a morsel of hard biscuit for the surviving child, against an emergency.

On 5th February, Ole Johansen, the carpenter, died, just before the rescue came.

## IV

### THE RESCUE

Early in the morning of 6th February, MacArthur made his landfall. He sighted St. Roque Island, a small barren rock nearly five hundred miles north of Cape St. Lucas. He had used the North-east Trades to work as far west as Long.  $120^{\circ} 50'$ , and as far north as Lat.  $28^{\circ} 50'$ , far out of his course, to the landsman's eye. Then reaching the region of variable winds, he was able to make a much more advantageous slant for the coast of California. The long-boat had been held inexorably upon her predetermined course of 2619 miles for forty-six days by the master mind. Despite the perils of wind and sea, despite sickness, hunger, thirst, weakness, disappointment, mutiny, death itself, the captain had reached the land he sought, and he had made assurance doubly sure. His admiring second

mate calls him "a wonderful navigator"; and this feat justifies his praise.

Though land was in sight, the castaways had still to suffer much from hope deferred. The coast was bold and rocky. MacArthur headed the boat south in search of a harbour. No landing could be effected. No one in the boat was of any real use but the two Nova Scotians. The man who had risen from a sick bed to fight fire, who had endured the extremity of hunger, thirst and pain, who bore the whole weight of responsibility, was, at the end of the ordeal, the strongest man in the boat. Loyal Edwin Anthony was so weak as to be hardly fit for duty. The three sailors, mere skin and bone, were lying helpless in the bottom of the boat.

Evening fell. Then in the gathering dusk, about half-past seven, MacArthur sighted a schooner about five miles to the eastward. He made every endeavour to reach the stranger, but the wind failed, and he could not come up with her. The night closed down and the sail of hope was lost to view. For the second time rescue seemed close at hand, and, for the second time, it vanished like a dream. "We were in despair."

This was the time that even Kate MacArthur's brave heart failed her. She begged her husband to pull the plug out of the bottom of the boat and put a period to their long-drawn agony. Drowning is a speedy and not a very hard death. MacArthur answered, "We will wait a little longer."

Two long hours passed. MacArthur lowered his sails and waited, pitching and tossing on the rough sea. His bloodshot eyes were straining through the darkness for a glimpse of the vanished sail. And then he made out vaguely the dim shape of the schooner in the

gloom. In the two hours of waiting she had drawn much nearer to the boat. The wind dropped. Both craft were becalmed. MacArthur set his living skeletons rowing the long-boat towards the schooner. He records, "It was with great difficulty that I could come up to her."

For a whole hour they toiled, shouting at the same time to attract the attention of the schooner's crew. Rescue was close at hand. The last remnants of their strength went into their frantic efforts to reach the ark of safety.

No answering hail came from the schooner until the boat was within one length of her; but the exhausted men had not the strength to pull those last few yards. Then someone shouted in Spanish, and MacArthur replied, "I have lost my ship and have been cast away for forty-six days in the boat. We are perishing for water and food."

The schooner captain flung him a line by which the boat was hauled alongside. Then, suddenly, he slacked off the line, dropping the boat some forty feet astern. The breeze freshened, the schooner's sails filled, and the boat began to tow in her wake. Next, without a word of warning, the line was cut, and a gun was fired from the schooner which forged ahead while the boat drifted rapidly astern.

What possible reason could there be for such inhuman treatment? To all in the boat, these seemed the acts of cruel madmen. In the darkness, hope of rescue died down again. A whole hour passed. It was now near midnight.

Then occurred another strange incident in this nightmare experience. Two men in a skiff rowed alongside.

They had come from the schooner with a breaker of water which they passed into the long-boat. The jabbering foreigners could give no explanation, but their intentions were evidently friendly. Mrs. MacArthur and her little boy got into the skiff; and then, to her consternation, the men rowed away with them into the darkness. The mystery of the strangers' actions was deepening every minute. How could their conduct be explained?

Soon the skiff reached the schooner's side, and the two passengers were taken on board. Mrs. MacArthur's condition must have been plain to every eye. The captain gave her a little wine to restore her. Speaking Spanish, for the stranger captain did not speak English, she made him understand, more by tears perhaps than words, that she wanted to be taken back to her husband in the derelict boat, lying off somewhere in the night.

The Spanish captain hesitated. He talked with his men, and Mrs. MacArthur standing by caught the drift of what they were saying. They knew that pirates were lurking about Cerros Island, whither they were bound; and when the big boat appeared mysteriously from nowhere, hailing them frantically in the darkness, they thought they had to deal with a gang of cut-throats attempting to seize their vessel. They drew their knives and prepared for a desperate resistance.

Mrs. MacArthur's Spanish was sufficient to make the captain understand the true situation. The mysterious boat was not manned by pirates, but by shipwrecked sailors at the point of death. As soon as he understood, he sent the skiff off again. That last hour must have been the most anxious that MacArthur knew in all the voyage, but in the end he had the relief of seeing



the skiff return. It made fast to the big boat and towed it back to the schooner, where all the castaways were taken on board. The vessel which had rescued them proved to be the *Thor*, captain Christobal Sosa, with a Mexican crew, bound up the coast for a cargo of dye-stuffs. MacArthur states: "As soon as they became satisfied that I intended them no harm, they treated me and my poor starving crew with the greatest kindness and consideration, and during my stay on board their kindness never ceased."

But the rescue was signalled by one more death. Worn out by his long vigils, privations, sufferings, MacArthur sat down on the deck of the *Thor* and leaned against the side of the cabin. For the first time since the alarm of fire on board the *Milton*, the burden of responsibility slipped from him, and he fell asleep. He had warned his men against drinking freely of the water in their exhausted condition. The two Nova Scotians heeded the warning, but Tilly Anderson, able seaman, mad with thirst, crawled to the water cask, worried the bung out, drank his fill, and, in spite of all that could be done for him, died the next day.

For three days, from 6th February to the 9th, the survivors of the *Milton* remained on board the *Thor*. The kindness of the Mexicans was great; they made ample amends for their previous mistakes, but the poor fellows had little to share with their guests. There was nothing to eat but "awful black bread." On the 9th they were a few miles south of Cerros Island, when they sighted the smoke of a steamer. For the first time in her regular trips, this vessel was passing on this particular side of the island. As she neared the *Thor*, MacArthur ran up his ensign, union down, and

the steamer immediately changed her course and made for the signal of distress.

When she came within a mile, MacArthur placed his sick men in the long-boat, and the crew of the *Thor* rowed them off to the waiting steamer. She proved to be the American passenger steamer *Newbern*, in command of Captain Thomas Huntington, from San Francisco, bound up the Gulf of California. They were taken on board and received every kindness. The two sailors, Annesitt and Ettinger, could not rise from the bottom of the boat and had to be lifted on board. Ettinger died a few hours afterwards. Captain MacArthur and Archie were in better condition than any of the others. Edwin Anthony and Mrs. MacArthur required no assistance in getting up the side. As she went up the companion-way, she heard a passenger exclaim:

“Oh! look at that poor squaw, so black and weather-beaten.”

It was four weeks before she could get the tangles out of her hair; but when she was interviewed in San Francisco, sixteen days later, she was recovering her looks. To the reporter she appeared “a pleasant, mild-spoken woman, with light hair, grey eyes, and cheeks on which the roses were struggling out through the tan of her exposure, and the pallor of her terrible suffering and sickness, although she was very weak and reduced in flesh.”

The tragic long-boat of the *Milton*, whittled and scarred, but still staunch, was given to the *Thor*, but the ship's compass was presented to the *Newbern*.

Two incidents come into the sequel. As the *Newbern* was entering Guyamas harbour on 16th February, Mrs.

MacArthur's baby was born. He was named Newbern Huntington after the steamer and the captain. Though weighing only three pounds at birth, the boy grew to manhood and is now a distinguished physician in California. On the evening of Saturday, 25th February, Mrs. MacArthur was being interviewed in the Devon House, Market Street, San Francisco. She had Newbern in her lap, with Archie, "a rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, chubby boy in a sailor suit," playing about the room, and occasionally joining in the conversation. She told the *Chronicle* reporter:

"I can't say that I ever completely gave up hope. I knew that we were under good protection and in safe hands, for I counted that God saw us, and cared for us."

Captain MacArthur's eye trouble was caused in part by the strain of taking sights with the sextant in a pitching, tossing boat. During the last week of the voyage, Anthony relieved him by making the daily observation. There was inflammation and great pain. He went to a San Francisco oculist for the necessary operation. Refusing to take chloroform, he gripped the arms of the chair he sat in and endured the pain without wincing, while streams of blood and pus ran down his cheeks. When it was all over, MacArthur asked about the fee. The answer was, "Nothing, to a man like you."







## AN ABLE SEAMAN

It is all very well for an excited member of Parliament to write enthusiastic letters about "heroic bravery," "almost superhuman efforts," "conditions considered almost hopeless," and urge that a man, who saves the lives of eight men at the risk of his own, should receive some recognition from the state; but the departments of government are cold-blooded institutions and do not act rashly. When, therefore, the member for Lunenburg urged the Canadian Minister of Marine to do something for Rufus Parks, able seaman of the schooner *Hilda Maude*, that high official took great pains to obtain the facts and sent down a printed list of questions to be filled in by the captain of the wrecked schooner under the eye of the collector of customs, and duly attested by him. Heroism is tabulated and reduced to a system by the Department of Marine and Fisheries. On the data so obtained this tale is based.

October 1891 was a month of storms and the 18th was a bad day for vessels in the North Atlantic. Among others, the fishing-schooner *Hilda Maude*, thirty-seven tons register, out of Lunenburg, was caught in the fierce autumn gale. She had been launched only that season, and had been lucky in her summer fishing, having filled her hold to capacity with six hundred and fifty quintals of fish; she had discharged her cargo, and was now engaged in the fall fishing on the bank off Ingonish. Needing more salt, she ran for Sydney. It was black

night when she reached the entrance of Sydney Harbour but could not make an entrance in the weather conditions. She was compelled to anchor in four fathoms, off Cranberry Head, at eight o'clock. It was wild weather. She got her two anchors down, and rode head to the storm, with forty fathom scope of chain. The crew were working all night and were drenched by the waves that broke clean over her from time to time. The little schooner lay in a very dangerous position off a lee shore in a violent storm.

The storm increased in violence as the hours passed. The *Hilda Maude* plunged and rolled and tore at her anchors all night, until the chains gave way at five o'clock. The giant breakers flung the little schooner about like a plaything, swung her along for about half a mile near to Black Point, where she brought up in shoal water. Luckily for her and all on board, she struck sandy bottom, not rock. The billows tossed her along, lifted and dropped her until she could go no farther. Then they rolled her to and fro with terrific violence. All her crew could do was to take to the rigging. The nine men went up the stays which were rat-lined, and lashed themselves fast. They could do nothing more to save their vessel. This was the only thing they could do to save themselves. If the vessel went to pieces, if the masts fell over the side, if the rigging gave way, swift death by drowning awaited them all. But the *Hilda Maude* was new and staunch. There was honest work put into her in Rafuse's yard at Conquerall Bank, and, in spite of the terrific battering, her timbers held together and her masts stood. All her four trawling dories were torn from the deck lashings, flung ashore and smashed, but, as the tide ebbed, and she bedded

in the sand, she remained firm, and so became a less precarious refuge for the nine men.

So passed two long anxious hours till faint daylight came about seven o'clock. Where she went ashore is not far from the famous Old Sydney mine, and some of the miners' houses are near the beach. When the news flew about that a vessel was ashore, they came out of their houses in the foggy, rainy, stormy morning, and lined the beach to the number of about a hundred to watch the spectacle of the nine men clinging to the two wave-swept masts only a few hundred yards away. On board the *Hilda Maude* the fishermen made strenuous efforts to save their lives. Their four boats were gone. They tried to send a line ashore, by fastening it to a trawl-buoy, the big twenty-gallon cask which keeps the baited trawl-line afloat upon the restless sea. The plan should have succeeded. Once the men on shore got hold of a line, they could drag the men on the wreck to safety one by one. Unfortunately, the backwash of the huge breakers always kept the buoy from getting within reach of those on shore, who were eager enough to help. That plan of rescue was definitely a failure.

The men on shore were not idle spectators of a possible tragedy. They would not stand by and watch those men drown without trying to save them. John Cox and three others made a brave effort. They tried to launch a boat. They did their best, but the boat was a sharp-pointed whaler; and they were miners, not sailor-men. The huge rollers were smashing and roaring on shore; and it was beyond their skill to launch the boat without filling her with water. Twice they tried and twice they failed. It needs skill and strength and ancient usage



even to get a boat afloat in such a welter of breaking water, recoil, backwash, and undertow. Afloat, it is then a problem to manage, keep her in trim, and row her.

The fishermen holding on for their lives in the rigging of the *Hilda Maude* could see all that was attempted on shore for their rescue. They could also note the failure, and in the words of one survivor, they "were getting anxious!" Captain Thomas Selig (for whose little daughter the schooner was named) asked who could swim. The man who responded to the call was Rufus Parks of Parks Creek, on the east bank of the beautiful La Have river near the mouth. The Parks are a substantial, sea-faring clan, fishermen, masters of tern schooners, owners of large, comfortable houses. Rufus was a young Hercules of twenty-two, two hundred pounds of bone and muscle hardened in daily labour of the severest kind, and moved by a heart in which fear never entered, and an indomitable will. Some debate there was between the captain and the "able seaman," as Parks was rated, with entire correctness. Captain Thomas Selig stated to the collector of customs for Lunenburg, that he thought it his duty to save his crew, but that he could not have reached the shore.

Parks pointed out that only the most powerful man could hope to reach the shore. Selig was married; he was not; so he was the man to run the desperate risk. He stripped to his drawers, gave his clothes to George Herman, the mate, who stood beside him in the fore-rigging, watched his chance between the waves, ran along the windward rail and sprang over the stern into the sea. He had a desperate battle for life in the icy water, and, though he had but a quarter of a mile to swim, he was utterly exhausted. It was almost like



swimming in a maelstrom. As his feet touched bottom, he fell forward on his face, benumbed, his strength gone, his strong frame helpless. But for ready aid, he must have drowned there and then. Two men rushed into the breakers and dragged him up the beach.

It took him some time to recover. He was led to a house near by and given clothing, food, and drink. In about an hour he had regained something like his normal strength. As his friend said, "He was ready for action again." He was safe on shore, but the idea of leaving his shipmates to perish assuredly never crossed his honest mind. He went back to the shore to see what could be done. The sharp-pointed whale-boat was useless. The four trawling dories had been hammered and broken against the shore. Three were utterly useless, but the fourth was not so badly damaged. One of the long pine strakes was split. Parks the indomitable procured hammer and nails, took pieces of the broken dories, and patched up the boat with them. A couple of men helped him to caulk the gaping side and to make it water-tight. At last it was fairly seaworthy. Then Parks asked if anyone would go off with him, for a trawling dory is eighteen feet long and requires two men to handle it. But the dangers were too plain. Not one man of the hundred would risk his life amongst those icy breakers; so Parks put off alone. Some helped him to launch the dory and run her out on the reflux of a wave into the towering combers which threatened to overwhelm boat and man together. A dory is the staunchest thing which man has ever built to contend with wind and wave. It is very simple in structure, all open, with sharp bow, a flat bottom and a V-shaped

stern. The thwarts can be removed. It will outlive a storm in which schooners founder. It is to the fisherman what his horse is to the cowboy. Parks was bred to the hard school of the sea. He had learned the fisherman's strenuous trade, as "flunkey," "trouter," "header," and then, after that apprenticeship, he was considered fit to take the bow oar of a dory, with an older hand. He had "gone astray" from his vessel once, that is, had been lost in his dory, been picked up and taken to St. Pierre.

This day he needed all his strength and skill. He had to do the work of two men in the worst of weather. His weight was an asset: it was necessary to keep the dory down in the water and prevent it from capsizing. Twice the watchers on shore saw the dory rocking, balancing, and smitten hither and thither by the waves, within an ace of being turned over. But she righted, for the fisherman "feels" his dory and accommodates his weight instinctively to swift-changing conditions. Foot by foot Parks fought his way to the lee of the stranded schooner. He brought the dory as close as he dared and the men in the rigging watched their chance and jumped. Jumping into dories is part of the fishing routine, and practice makes perfect. The first to take the hazardous leap was Uriah Smith. Parks rowed back swiftly with him and returned as before. He made three trips in all and brought off every man. True to the rigid etiquette of the sea, the captain was the last man to leave the wreck. He was injured by a piece of wreckage; and all were getting "stiff" and "anxious." From the time Parks sprang into the sea until he had the last man on shore was about three hours. The master reported his craft abandoned at ten in the

morning. Captain Selig's remarks to the collector form the best commentary on this "golden deed":

"As master I deemed it my first duty to make an effort to save my crew, and was prepared to attempt to swim ashore. My man Parks said he was abler and more like to accomplish a landing. I am sure I would have failed, as he was exhausted when he reached a place of safety on the beach. His skill in repairing the boat, strength to row off against wind and sea, and courageous impulse to save, were, under God's hand, the means of our salvation from a watery grave."


The representations of Mr. Kaulbach, M.P. for Lunenburg, received the attention of the minister, and the Government of Canada duly presented Rufus Parks with a silver watch, which cost thirty dollars, "in recognition of his humane exertions." The Royal Humane Society gave him their silver medal "for having preserved the life of a citizen," as the Latin inscription has it. But Rufus Parks preserved the lives of eight citizens. The rewards were of silver, but the deed was pure gold.

"It is one of the most remarkable characteristics of a Golden Deed," writes Charlotte M. Yonge, "that the doer of it is certain to feel it merely a duty: 'I have done that which it was my duty to do' is the natural answer of those capable of such actions. They have been constrained to them by duty, or by pity, have never even deemed it possible to act otherwise, and did not once think of themselves in the matter at all. For the true metal of a Golden Deed is self-devotion."

The exploit of Rufus Parks is notable, not because it stands alone, but because it is typical of our Nova

Scotia sea-faring men. In the night of 4th January, 1922, Matthew Munro, master of the schooner *Alexandria*, cast on a lee shore in a blizzard, swam off in his sea-boots and "oilies" with a line and dragged the five men of his crew to safety. Such rescues are taken as a matter of course, and hardly noted. But because the deed of Rufus Parks, A.B. of the *Hilda Maude*, is typical, his name should be held in honour wherever heroism is esteemed, and most of all in his native province.





## THE LUCK OF THE "GRILSE"

ON Christmas Day, 1916, all the King's Ships in Halifax Harbour wore green branches at their mast-heads and yard-arms, according to ancient Navy custom. The little torpedo-boat destroyer *Grilse* was moored at the dock, within a pistol-shot of where the *Shannon* swung at anchor with her prize the *Chesapeake* a hundred years ago. She alone had no decoration, but she surely deserved at least a feather in her cap for what she had gone through.

Inspection showed her planking still dirty with oil, a huge dinge in the forward funnel, one mast gone, the deck swept clean of gear, and the heavy starboard stanchions supporting the bridge bent inwards like wet cardboard. The engine-room hatch had its back broken; instead of showing like the roof of a house, it was squashed flat, and covered over with planking and canvas. All this breaking and tearing had been done by tons weight of water suddenly flung upon the little ship. Down below, the spacious engine-room where the turbines live was dry and fairly clean. The men's quarters were in confusion; they had been washed out by the sea. But, on the whole, the *Grilse* did not look a wreck. None the less, six of her crew had met their death only thirteen days before. That the entire forty-five officers and men did not go the same road is due to their courage, skill and endless endurance.

Halifax in the winter months is no place for an

unheated, iron vessel; men cannot live in it. Ever since it was a naval station, the King's Ships have come north in the summer to avoid the heat, and gone south to Bermuda or the West Indies in the winter to avoid the cold. The problem of the *Grilse* in following this routine was how to make the voyage without escort. She burns oil for fuel and her tanks hold just enough to take her from Halifax to Bermuda in perfect weather conditions. A reserve of oil in casks was therefore stowed on her low after-deck; it was a load which weighted her down.

When she left Halifax on Monday, 11th December, at 2.45 P.M., the weather conditions were distinctly favourable, and all went well until ten o'clock on Tuesday morning. Then the wind got up from the south-west and began to blow hard, raising a heavy sea. In two hours the weather was so bad that Captain Wingate decided to turn about and steer for Shelburne, the old Loyalist town in the western end of Nova Scotia.

The weather grew worse and worse. In a seaway the fabric of a ship is subjected to sudden unexpected and terrific strains. When balanced on the crest of a wave, the centre rises; this is called "hogging." When balanced on two waves at bow and stern, the centre sinks; this is called "sagging." The heavier and more confused the sea, the more sudden and terrific are the strains. After several hours of buffeting by the storm, the seams of the *Grilse* began to open; and about five o'clock she was leaking forward. The water came in fast. In spite of all exertions, stopping the leaks with tallow and shoring up the sides with timber, the water still poured in. She came down by the head, with four

or five feet of water in the hold. This spoiled her trim, set her screws racing under her shallow overhang, and also made her very hard to steer.

The deck-load of oil-casks also incommoded her. It was decided to get rid of them. So the men set to work staving in the barrels, letting the oil flow into the sea, and then heaving the empty barrels overboard. It was dangerous work in the dark, on the low, reeling, wave-swept deck, which was soon slippery with oil. About 4 P.M. Lieutenant Winsloe found J. Chandler, leading seaman, helpless in the torpedo-racer, the circular frame on the after-deck whence the torpedo is discharged; his right leg was broken above the knee. With two other sailors he had been busy getting rid of the oil-barrels. The other two, Ashwin and Harris, had disappeared. How they went is easy to understand. On the reeling, heaving, slippery deck it was almost impossible for a man to keep his footing. Working in the dark at a difficult, dangerous task, a sudden lurch would fling him head-foremost into the black waters. With the greatest difficulty Chandler was extricated from the "racer" and carried to the officers' quarters. A boat-hook was sawn off the proper length, one end placed under his armpit, and then lashed to his body and his broken leg. So he lay suffering on a mattress on the sloppy floor until the rescue.

The leaks gained, and could not be controlled; the water rose in the hold; the storm increased in violence. By half-past seven there seemed to be no prospect but death for all on board the *Grilse*, and the wireless signal "Sinking, send assistance" was flashed abroad on the ether by the modern magic of electricity. It was regarded on shore as the last cry for help of men in



utter extremity. No more messages were received from the labouring vessel in the heart of the winter storm, and for forty-eight hours Canada believed that the *Grilse* had gone down with all hands. Government vessels dispatched without delay to the destroyer's last position returned after scouring the sea with no tidings of her.

Bad as the plight of the *Grilse* was when that cry for help was sent off, it soon became worse. At eight o'clock the little vessel was smitten by a tremendous sea which laid her on her beam ends. The three officers, Wingate, Winsloe and Fry, were all on the bridge at the time, with the quartermaster, Tucker, in charge of the wheel. That huge billow nearly capsized the *Grilse*. She went over and over, until one of the officers found himself standing on the *side* of the chart-table—a very solid box for the indispensable maps, in the middle of the bridge—as if on a floor. She heeled over to eighty degrees. Now ninety degrees make a right angle. Why she did not there and then turn turtle, no one can say. The reflex of the same wave that broached her to struck her hard on the other side, and slowly, very reluctantly indeed, she righted; but she did not recover an even keel. Until she reached safety, she was navigated lying down on one side, with the stern sticking up and the bow burrowing in the waves.

The damage wrought by that one wave was tremendous. It tore the two life-boats and the life-raft from their heavy lashings and swept them away into the darkness. It carried away the after-mast with the aerials, which were ultimately discovered wound round and round the starboard propeller. Consequently no more wireless messages could be sent out. Worst of



all, tons of water falling like a cataract on the frail glass skylight over the engine-room broke its back and flooded the space below as deep as a man's armpits. Steel hatches over the skylight would have warded off such an accident, but the *Grilse* had no steel hatches.

Nor was this the worst. All over the ship the electric lights went out, and could not be renewed. All that was done henceforth on board the *Grilse* was done in the dark. It was also at this time that the chief loss of life occurred. R. Wilkinson, artificer-engineer, being seasick and going on deck, disappeared in the black night. No one saw him go. E. Clement, warrant telegraphist, trying to rig new wires for signalling, vanished in the darkness. Signalman McAuliffe, a Halifax boy, went with the others, and Chief Petty Officer Trimbee was lost cutting away one of the boats.

There was no time to mourn their loss. The crew set to work repairing damages and worked like sailors—there is no higher praise—to save their ship and their lives. Under the direction of the navigating officer, C. McLean Fry, the engine-room hatch was covered over with whatever material would serve to keep the water out. In this task Fry lost his footing and slid along the deck on his back under the spare torpedo, which was lashed to the engine-room casing. The twin propellers caught him fair in the face. They laid his lips open to the bone from the nose to the chin, and gashed his right cheek. Once more Winsloe acted surgeon and gave first aid, tying up the wounds as best he could. Indeed the bandages were necessarily so tight that the patient could scarcely breathe. A cigarette-holder between his split lips overcame this difficulty. So he was out of the saga.‡

Leaking, down by the head, with a heavy list, her engine-room flooded, her lights out, one propeller useless, six men drowned and two disabled, the *Grilse* seemed doomed. None the less the fight went on valiantly. Down in the engine-room, up to his armpits in sea water, Artificer Swarbrick worked his levers by the feel. Of their own accord, the stokers fastened down the air-tight hatch over their heads, and stuck to their job. They "carried on." It's a way they have in the Navy. The *Grilse* was Glasgow built and must represent much honest rivetting, for not a spoonful of water got into the stoke-hold. Up on the bridge, Wingate, Winsloe and Quartermaster Tucker humoured the crippled vessel and kept her on her course. No second swamping wave swept over her, but the danger was by no means past.

So Monday night passed, and Tuesday and Wednesday. Slowly the *Grilse* crawled on her course, in jeopardy every hour. On Wednesday night Swarbrick reported that he was afraid of his turbines "seizing," that is refusing to work, if he could not get at them with the lubricating oil. But the big engine-room was full of water, churning about with every motion of the ship, and in the watery confusion, this remarkable artificer, without sleep, without relief, somehow stuck to his task. There was nothing to do but stop the engines, form a bucket-brigade and bale out the engine-room, spoonful by spoonful. So it was done, as the *Grilse* pitched and rolled and wallowed helplessly in the Atlantic winter storm. The officers took their turn with the men, down in the darkness, wet to the skin, handing buckets up the engine-room ladder, passing them over the side. Muscles ached until they almost defied the will to make them perform their task. But

the word in the Navy is "Carry on" until the appointed task is done; and all hands "carried on."

Besides the constant danger of foundering, there was the possibility of men collapsing from hunger, exposure and sheer hard work. The oil and the sea water together had spoiled all the food; there was little or nothing to eat; but luckily there was a supply of Navy rum, and the strong drink given to men ready to perish whipped up their flagging muscles and cheered them in their endless labour. Fortunately also there was a supply of tinned soup. The tins were fastened to the steam-pipes, and when thoroughly hot were opened and handed round. The food and the stimulant together kept up the strength of the crew. As they neared the coast of Nova Scotia, the weather turned bitter cold.

All through Wednesday night the "Grilses" toiled at their interminable task; but, by Thursday morning, the engine-room was free from water and Swarbrick could oil his turbines. Once more the engines began to work, and the *Grilse*, "leaking like a lobster-pot, steering like a dray," proceeded on her course to Shelburne. Late on Thursday night she came yawing up to the wharf, and her troubles were over. From one end of Canada to the other the good news flashed over the electric wire. Letters and telegrams of sympathy and congratulation poured in from all the wide Dominion. No return of men from death to life so stirred Nova Scotia since the First Contingent came home from the Boer War.

Professional comment was more restrained. That also is a way they have in the Navy. "They had a pretty thin time," was one sympathetic officer's verdict. Another considered the prominence given to the episode by the newspapers as "impertinence." All round the British

coast, trawlers, drifters, destroyers were doing the same sort of thing, day in and day out. There was really nothing to make a fuss over. There was, of course, a court of inquiry, but as the officers were not hanged at the yard-arm or shot at dawn, it may be inferred that the department approved of their conduct. Such navigation would be a credit to any officers or crew in the Royal Navy; and these were volunteers—amateurs.

The little *Grilse* was certainly entitled to a feather in her cap.

It may be added that before the war she was the pleasure-yacht of a rich Canadian, who presented his vessel to the government. After the war she became the property of a New York millionaire. This perilous voyage to Bermuda is the one exciting episode in a humdrum career.



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